SOUND PROJECTOR

HARRY PARTCH IS THE WAYWARD

ASHTRAY NAVIGATIONS

IDEA FIRE COMPANY

14

VIBRACATHEDRAL ORCHESTRA

THE SHADOW RING

quiet music
FIELD RECORDINGS
BLACK METAL

NOISE
ART
DRONES
TAPES

CONTEMPORARY MUSIC
FROM JAPAN,
AUSTRALIA, FINLAND,
UK & THE USA

14TH ISSUE

The Sound Projector 14th Issue

"The Tower Struck by Lightning"

Published Winter 2005-06

ED PINSENT
THE SOUND PROJECTOR
BM BEMUSED
LONDON WC1N 3XX
UNITED KINGDOM
ed@soundprojector.demon.co.uk
www.thesoundprojector.com

Back issues are available from the website. PayPal accepted; we ship anywhere.

CREDITS

Written, edited and published by ED PINSENT

With the help of
JENNIFER HOR
AARON ROBERTSON
HARLEY RICHARDSON
JOHN BAGNALL
RICHARD REES JONES
STEVE BYNGHALL

Picture credits:

Jim Evans – photo of Chris Corsano and Paul Flaherty on page 17
Marg Bancewicz – photos of Ashtray Navigations on pages 86-88.
(marg@peripheralanomaly.co.uk, http://www.peripheralanomaly.co.uk)
Stephen Lawrie (of The Telescopes) – photo of Jazzfinger on page 100
Karla Borecky – paintings and drawings in the IFCO interview, pages 70, 72, 75
Scott Foust - photo on page 78, from Tim Shortell's film *The Terrible Comet Salt*.
Graham Lambkin – various artworks in The Shadow Ring interview,
and original drawings on pages 2, 40, 84 and 134
Remaining drawings by Ed Pinsent
The front cover is based loosely on a film poster by the Stenberg Brothers.

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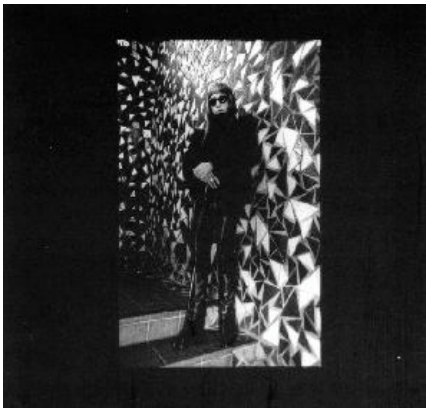
MUSIC FROM JAPAN



Keiji Haino
Black Blues
FRANCE LES DISQUES DU SOLEIL ET DE L'ACIER DSA54087 CD (2004)
Keiji Haino
Black Blues
FRANCE LES DISQUES DU SOLEIL ET DE L'ACIER DSA54088 CD (2004)

Why DSA couldn't have put these two recordings together in the same package with the mirror-image photographs and saved a lot of confusion on the part of distributors, retailers and buyers alike, I'll never know: the concept of contrasting two almost diametrically opposed treatments of the same six blues songs covered by the same artist might have been more apparent on a double CD set if only because you feel obliged to listen to both discs to find out if you've got your money's worth. As it stands, if you buy one CD and happen not to like it (or on the other hand do happen to like it), would you necessarily buy the other on the grounds of 'well the first one sucked so the second one probably sucks as well' (or 'the first one was good so I'll stick with that')? I think also there'd be quite a few of DSA54087 (the 'soft / acoustic' disc) languishing on the racks of record shops while everybody fights over the DSA54088 (the 'loud / electric' one) copies. Oh dear! I think eventually DSA and Haino will have to bite the bullet and at least release the two as a double set together even if only on vinyl.

Anyhow, on playing these discs back-to-back, I found the 'contrast' between these CDs turns out not to be great musically; the greatest contrasts are in the singing and the emotions at work in the singing and those engendered by the singing. (A minor difference is that one disc is longer than the other by six minutes.) On the 'soft / acoustic' disc (a misnomer as Haino does use an electric guitar on this CD), Haino adopts a sorrowful elegiac approach and sings the songs as lullabies. Except these lullabies are for those on the brink of death of some sort, figuratively as well as literally. The forced intimacy is painful, certainly for the listener and maybe also for the artist; at times, it feels unhealthy as though an executioner / victim relationship exists here. The spaces within the music are no less fraught with fear and terror than the actual music itself, stark and emotionally raw as it is. Yet Haino's control of the music and the emotions and suspense evoked is so complete that he retains the listener's attention right through to the agonising end without overdoing the pain or over-capitalising on the suspense. The entire recording is very severely minimal.

A harrowing, tortured vocal style is used on the 'loud / electric' disc though again Haino is always in control and doesn't overdo the raw screeching vocals; everything is kept surprisingly minimal despite the outpouring of pain. The guitar tone is raw and quite ominous but, apart from track 5 where it starts to resemble Haino's work with Fushitsusha, it's never really brutal. As with the previous disc there is plenty of space though somewhat less. A greater psychological distance exists between the performer and the listener; the listener seems compelled to be an unwilling voyeur of a snuff film in which the executioner is his own sadomasochistic victim. At times the torture seems rather forced and self-pitying. This is probably one recording where Haino could afford to 'let go' of the music somewhat and let it take him where it will, and this would provide another contrast with the 'soft / acoustic' album.

Funnily although the same songs are covered on both CDs they seem rather different creatures when subjected to the 'soft' and 'loud' treatments to the extent that on each disc the pieces seem more related to one another than to their counterparts on the other disc. Also if I knew Diamanda Galas's version of 'See that my grave is kept clean', I'd have a base of sorts to compare Haino's 'soft' and 'loud' versions of the song (the 'loud' version is a deconstruction of sorts) and I'd be able to tell you who does a better job of the 'screeching harpy with masses of flailing black hair' act; hey, everybody should get all three versions and play them all as a 'duet' to entertain friends and spook the neighbours!

I fear that most people will prefer the 'loud / electric' version seeing that this features Haino at his most Fushitsusha-familiar but you really do need both versions to appreciate Haino's different approaches to pain and existential anguish

and they're essential documents of Haino as singer / performance artist. The music itself is really only a counterpoint to Haino's singing and expression of raw emotions.

JENNIFER HOR 08/08/2005
www.dsa-wave.com

Boris with Merzbow
04092001
JAPAN INOXIA RECORDS IXLP-0005 VINYL LP (2004)

In which the power trio of Takeshi, Wata and Atsuo raise their axes to do battle with the deadly power-box of Merzbow…and a surprisingly flat LP results. Everything about this release tends towards raising your hopes to an astronomical level…the very idea of the team-up itself (on a par with Godzilla vs King Ghidora), the thick sturdy LP package printed in black, silver and adorned with stern curlicue Gothic lettering, the very difficulty of even owning a copy, let alone snagging a vinyl edition…surely we've every right to expect something that moves with the speed of Mercury, is as solid as silver-plated nickel, and carries the atomic weight of Jupiter's core! But instead, the rock elements turn out to be tired and lacking in force; the noise holding it together is wimpish groaning feedback, pitiful whines, and non-descript rumbling.

Recorded live on said date exactly 4 years ago at time of writing, mastered in 2003. Side one shows the team thrashing about in sluggish mode, finding it hard to get warmed up; a solid drone results from so much equipment, amp hum, computers etc piled up on stage along with four sweaty Japanese guys, which isn't too bad, but the rock-guitar trio is already off to a bad start. They sound like they're cramped, hemmed in. Maybe everyone's getting in each other's way; maybe I need to crank up the volume even higher. Neither

side of this tug-of-war seems to be pulling hard enough, or pushing against each other as you'd expect. Indeed so far, both of 'em are turning in very ordinary performances – and this from the men who brought us *AbsoluteGo* and *Pulse Demon*. Someone recently warned me that Boris were just a bunch of chancers, with their bad imitations of Deep Purple riffs, excesses of dry ice and long hair to conceal lack of talent. Maybe the infidels are right? Am I wasting my time collecting this rubbish? At last side one steps up a notch, as Boris shift into 'heavy punk' rock riffing, with high-speed drumming and hearty screeches, but the lead guitar work seems staggeringly inept and clichéd. This really is not as excessive as was hoped.

Flip vinyl over, note the clever label which is a pastiche of the original Roger Dean design for Virgin records, an image which graced many a prog-rock excess back in the 1970s. This is Boris wearing their aspirations on their sleeve; but it's not enough to want, you have to be! At last the music improves, where we get the thrilling combination of shrill power electronics with retro 1970s power-chord riffing. Both sides loosen up and begin to deliver the goods. For a brief glorious moment, it shines, startles and then shocks the listener; but I wanted it to be like this all the way through, a series of intense body-blows that leave you breathless. Well, maybe the rematch CD (*Sun Baked Snow Cave*, on Hydra Head) proved to be more of a gorefest. As I always say, no guts, no glory!

ED PINSENT 03/09/2005

L
Holy Letters
USA VHF RECORDS VHRF#84 CD (2005)

Because this is an intensely personal record by Hiroyuki Usui (a former member of Fushitsusha), this album can come across as rather on the mawkish side, especially when Usui starts singing in that naif way that reminds me a bit of Nagisa Ni Te and Maher Shalal Hash Baz, and therefore I can only really recommend it to those who are really keen on those bands' psychedelic folk pop style. A bluesy element in the music enhances the lyrics and spoken word passages, the subject matter of which deals with the Oneness of life, the cycle of life and death, and one individual's life-long journey to discover the meaning and goal of life (that is, interacting with others who represent aspects of the Oneness of life). The better tracks on the album are ones that feature other instruments such as the didgeridoo (a deep resonant droning wind instrument used by indigenous Australian peoples whose potential as an ethnic avant-garde instrument is yet to be realised) and organ in addition to acoustic guitars, Usui's main instruments of choice. Moments of beauty appear on pieces like 'Benares Blue' but overall the album doesn't appeal to me greatly. Those of you who are loyal TSP readers know that over several issues I have reviewed a number of CDs full of melancholy, despair and the pain of life (indeed, an entire section of CDs I and only I reviewed was titled 'Pain!' in one issue, although I think this referred to the styles of music covered, not the lyrical themes or the mood) so it is not the saturnine mood nor the lyrical content that is, uh, getting me down; nah, I think it is the musical approach which has a whiff of the precious and self-indulgent that keeps me distant. As Usui admits himself in the sleeve notes, the themes he covers are universal and everybody more or less understands them; really, what I think he needed to do was create a shorter (less than 70+ minutes anyway), more concise and less meandering record.

At the risk of embarrassing someone, should I mention that Taku Sugimoto plays electric guitar on Track 9 on this album?

JENNIFER HOR 15/03/2005
www.vhfrecords.com

Greenmachine
D.A.M.N.
USA MAN'S RUIN RECORDS MR103 CD (ND)
Greenmachine
The Earth Beater
US MAN'S RUIN RECORDS MR156 CD (1999)

These early albums by Japanese heavy rock trio Greenmachine showcase their style of deep stoner rock groove mixed with hardcore aggression and harsh throaty vocals. Blend the steel rifferama of Boris or maybe the Melvins with the attack-dog attitude of US bands like Helmet and Unsane and add that unique Japanese sensibility which sees beauty in ugliness and ugliness in beauty and understands each is the necessary mirror image of the other, and you have an idea of what Greenmachine sound like. Actually, within that unrelenting hardcore / metal juggernaut that is GM, there is room for melody (though not very distinctive or tuneful), proficient and tight yet easy-flowing musicianship and, judging from the lyrics on *The Earth Beater*, pause for self-reflection.

On *D.A.M.N.*, titles like 'Red Eye' and 'Cunt Maniac' sit alongside 'Flower', 'Knowledge' and 'Underdone' which give some idea of the lyrical territory GM were covering although unfortunately the lyrics are not printed on the sleeve. The music is very thrashy and raw, unadulterated aggression with a steely undertone.

On *The Earth Beater*, the printed lyrics are pretty much of an apocalyptic nature though, uh, they don't make much sense to me; if they're of the stream-of-consciousness sort then of course I understand and I should leave my left-brain analytical functions at the front door. The music on this CD is much the same as on the previous if a little gentler with some attempt at creating a quiet albeit ominous mood on a couple of tracks. Song titles include mind-bogglers like 'Hempty God Returns To Sky', '72% Decay' and 'Barbarian Dope' and the sleeve art is more colourful and prettier to look at and definitely less emetic than it is on the previously mentioned CD.

I understand that GM have moved on from their hardcore / heavy melodic rock moorings into apparently more heavy sludge rock territory inhabited by the likes of Boris and Corrupted with their more recent 'Archives of Rotten Blues' album on DIW Phalanx; this label has also reissued *D.A.M.N.* and *The Earth Beater* with different sleeve art, which should be a relief to those who can't stand looking at the combined effects of menstruation and S-bend blockages on bathroom plumbing fixtures.

JENNIFER HOR 15/03/2005
www.mansruin.com
mansruin@sirius.com

Ikuro Takahashi

Domori to Sanshu

USA SIWA RECORDS SCD001 CD (2005)

Fantastic! The first ever CD release I think from this eclectic and specialist record label, who through the years have issued many fine items on vinyl with deluxe silkscreened covers. Indeed one such delectable object was reviewed last ish, an LP in white vinyl by this very same Japanese sound-artist who is in a class of his own. Loved that luscious release so much that when I heard of this release's imminence, I nearly went apoplectic in my rush to order up a copy. My haste was rewarded, for I now hold in my lobster claws a copy of the early pressing in a screenprinted wooden slipcase. But it's not just a tactile art object, the sound of Takahashi's work is what counts. This release comprises 'Domori to Sanshu' recorded live, and a preparatory sketch for same work, entitled 'Domori to Sanshu Study II'.

Takahashi's music, or sonic landscaping or whatever, is incredibly pure and may seem ludicrously simple on the surface; think of a single bed of white electronic noise, which gradually reveals its levels of intense detail as you listen. Similar effect was noted on the vinyl release, emulating the sound of little cicadas chirping. The sonic equivalent of running your fingers across a bed of rich verdant moss. Or a gigantic whale encountering shoals of tiny fish on the seabed. Or a whitewashed building in which you can perceive the surface texture of every single brick up close. I was warned that this record might not be as 'intense' as the vinyl rec, but I'm not complaining when I can get my regular dose of shrill, highly-concentrated and focused electronic sound vibrations. Bliss...life has meaning.

The live track delivers said dose of vibrations, and after some five minutes adds the dimension of drumming, crisply delivered and played in a fairly animated fashion, as though the performer were moving in sympathy with his own troupe of virtual insects; can't stress enough how this sound reminds you of being eaten alive by mosquitoes, beetles, locusts and spiny stick insects; yes, that's how enjoyable it is. Takahashi has also worked with his performance-art partner, and as a duo they produce a species of very extreme sound-theatre that must be miraculous to behold. We're still on track one...the drumming interlude subsides, to be replaced by yet further layers of electronic chirping, bringing it back to that near-hallucinatory level of concentration. The hand controlling the levels is merciless, increasing the degree of pain and ear-splitting high tones with the fatalistic precision of a skilled torturer.

The second cut proves to be a gorgeous, thick and heavy drone, throbbing in a very vital fashion with a fascinatingly varied inner pulse. Imagine climbing into a Jacuzzi that's been filled with clotted cream and honey, with an additional vibratory device to increase the sensual pleasure. This one's very much in the lower ranges. You can visualise 20 bullfrogs nearby, playing the bagpipes. Their natural sound is slowed down to produce a dull roar, a sound which can do amazing things to your entire body as it gives you a powerful massage you're not likely to forget in a hurry. I tell you, this sound-art is just completely out there, fearlessly occupying its own unique turf. It has a bizarre beauty which just seems to go on and on forever.

ED PINSENT 30/07/2005
www.siwarecords.com

Acid Mothers Temple and The Melting Paraiso U.F.O.

Minstrel in the Galaxy

UK RIOT SEASON REPOSECD07 CD (2004)

Certainly one of the more 'laid-back' releases from this ultra-prolific Japanese collective. It's lengthy and mostly pretty dull. Following a moody tambura drone and a spoken introduction (in French) from vocalist Tiffany, we're off into the interminable 40-minute title track. Wade through long minutes of Cosmic Jokers / Tangerine Dream styled noodling at the start, an occasional guitar whine, and gently pattering percussion. So far it's a hippie dope party where the long-haired zombies are just wandering around stoned and not speaking a word. Some galaxy this is turning out to be...very little life in it! Eventually the music becomes less spectral, as it gains a slow pulsebeat and the vocal contingent do some weird wailing and twittering in a very cosmic way. After some 11-12 minutes it finally takes off, eventually getting into the pomp and grandeur mode. Electronics are added sparingly, adding to the 'space rock' feeling. Admittedly, this does grow into something fairly freaky, but it takes a hell of a time to get there. Considering this is the main reason for buying the record, you may want to think about getting seriously stoned or generally wasted before playback, or at least have some friends around to relieve the tedium. The title's pretty naff too, come to think of it – who in their right mind would want to reference a Jethro Tull LP? And what a terrible cover!

This wild-haired bohemian bunch of Japanese fellows have been pretty successful at tapping into a general 1970s music vibe (Krautrock and Prog in particular), and reaching an audience (most of whom were born after 1985) who wish to consume it avidly, and frequently. They have sometimes managed to do it convincingly, but not on this windy release, which is so flabby and elongated it even makes Gong seem like masters of concision. The multi-talented Kawabata Makoto is the main man, of course, lead guitarist and bearer of 'Speed Guru' credit on this record. Speed? That's ironic, for a record so lugubrious and slow-building! This record is also distinguished by guest voices from Oni and Pikacyu, from recent Sonic Youth support act Afrirampo. This record is also the first AMT release without Cotton Casino, the chain-smoking synth player, who clearly contributed a lot to their cohesiveness. The closing track showcases another talent, that of Suyama Atsushi who wrote and performed the song. It's called 'St Bel Canta' and is a 7-minute acoustic guitar song with a dull, silly melody bolstering its pomposity; think of Donovan, Tim Buckley territory. There's a nice drone in the background and some exciting Theremin-like whoops. The singer's thin voice is drenched in echo to add that 'authentic' acid-folk tinge, but there's no getting away from the syntheticness of this.

ED PINSENT 30/07/2005
www.riotseason.com

Acid Mothers Temple and The Melting Paraiso U.F.O.

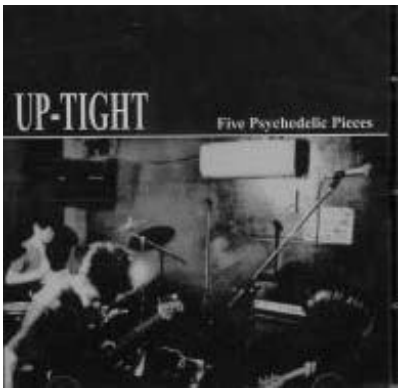
Born to be Wild in the USA 2000

USA WABANA ORE-39 CD CD (2004)

This is a *bit* more like it. Another CD from Wabana offering a

facsimile of an LP boot artefact, a fairly notorious live recording taped during their USA tour of 2000, and a document filled with energy, unrestrained high volumes, and playing so fast and free that it borders on the incoherent; if that's they way you like your psychedelic rock, then snarf up this good example. 'La Rovia' (which originally would have dominated the A side of the LP) is particularly blistering – showcasing a heavy metal tune, continually lashed and whipped by insanely choppy riffing, and excessive use of FX pedals pushed to the floor. It's a pretty distorted recording, and you can lose the thread if you're not paying attention; if this happens, the music quickly turns into shapeless black noise. But when you get the groove back again, it's like everything prog rock and 70s metal could have been, in 14 glorious minutes. Yum. This track alone could probably hold its head up with any of the recent Boris efforts…it's more like Black Sabbath than the original band were! The original B side of LP includes 'Pink Lady Lemonade', a total psych echo-drenched sunshine-blotter special; 'Speed Guru', a high-octane punk feedback Blue Öyster Cult overdrive slice of guitar mania; and 'God Bless USA', a one-minute concert closer that shows you that no matter how excessive a band can get, they can always go one step further. 60 seconds of completely insane noise and power. A fine non-nonsense 'good rockin' disc.

ED PINSENT 15/09/2005



Up-tight

Five Psychedelic Pieces

UK STATIC CARAVAN RECORDINGS STATIC 9 CD (2004)

A more matter-of-fact album title you'll be hard put to find: yes, no more and no less than five mostly instrumental tracks that embrace the territory from hard rock to dreamy pop psychedelia including, on one live piece, numerous explosions of guitars-n-drums dynamite held together by strings of yawn-inducing rambling strumming in search of originality. Yes I know it's a strange description but though this young trio does have some very lovely and bewitching sounds and melodies, plays as a tight unit with a good rhythm section and does a good line in pyrotechnics displays, it also has a tendency to lapse into a plodding 70s hard rock time warp when inspiration is on the short side, particularly on the last track. Doesn't sound like a good sign of things to come but I believe this is the band's US debut album and so not necessarily to be taken as an illustration of these musicians' true potential.

An early highlight is 'At 2:00 am I am waiting for someone', an appropriately hazy and wistful song powered by drifting clouds of acid-tinged guitar fuzz and pure guitar tones; it's not so much of an issue here for the music to coast along as the lyrics push the song and the dreamy atmosphere is all-important. Then we go into the best track of the album, 'Visions of key of A', a live number punctuated by ballistic percussion episodes and jagged guitars soaring high into the magnetosphere. Tomoyuki Aoki and friends understand the importance of building up momentum with pummelling drums and bleeding 6-string attacks to climaxes where amplifiers as well as instruments are flying high in outer space and so they are a bit easier on the ear than the supersonic jet-fuelled Makoto Kawabata in Acid Mothers Temple / Mainliner mode.

A track that is definitely very easy on the ear is 'Falling in love' which sees Up-tight a bit less so in ballad territory: very calming and peaceful, content to meander and maintain some tranquil scenery; thunder comes in during the eighth minute mainly to see off the track in a triumphant way. Not quite so easy on the senses because of its length and the band appearing to lose its way and fall into hard rock / prog rock clichés is 'Sweet sister session'; why Aoki and pals have to forsake melody and atmosphere and waste time stringing fireworks displays, wonderful though they are initially, with dull pub rock rhythms we will never know but will file this simply in the category of Life's Conundrums along with 'Why did the chicken cross the road?', 'Which came first, the chicken or the egg?' and so on and so forth.

Despite some shortcomings, Up-tight are worth watching: at this time of writing (April 2005) they had another album 'Lucrezia' out which I hear is even more drenched in dark and heavy guitar psychedelia. The likes of Kousokuya and Kawabata at least must be looking over their shoulders at the new generation of psychedelic guitar bands like Up-tight, LSD-march, Green Milk From The Planet Orange and Miminikoto among others ...

JENNIFER HOR 11/04/2005
www.staticcaravan.org

Flower Travellin' Band

Satori

UK RADIOACTIVE RECORDS RRCD031 CD (ND)

One of the best reissues I've heard so far, this record, to judge from its sleeve art of Indian gods, a Buddha figure and various Western art icons, would appear to offer a mystical dippy hippy experience but in fact delivers a very strong, even powerful style (for the period, this being the early 1970s) of hard rock with a sinister sound. The band members might have believed in flower power and love is all you need(ed) but the music suggests their ears were deep in Black Sabbath territory with a touch of the Deep Purple. Even the singing, at times very high-pitched and forceful, recalls Ozzy Osbourne and Ian Gillan.

All five tracks on this album represent five movements of the one piece 'Satori' and all feature very distinctive and robust melodies, riffs and rhythms: the third track in particular is very Sabbath-influenced and seems gravid with dread and fear. (At this point I confess I've not heard a lot of Black Sabbath and much of what I have heard in the way of Sabbath tunes is actually cover versions so I guess it is kinda strange I can pick up the influence on this record.) Track 4, still deeply riff-based, presents a more eccentric and friendly side of the band, one more in agreement with the guys' presumably hippy aspirations and somehow the name Damo Suzuki floats into the mind as a way of comparison. Surprisingly given that there is a lot of instrumental music with quite prominent lead guitar within conventional song-based structures and we are talking about a record made more than 30 years ago, technique is not a big thing with this band though the members are proficient musicians and present a tight unit. Possibly the one thing I might gripe about is the lack of attention to atmosphere: the music might have benefited from a fuzzy production in places and a slight echo effect might have been useful here and there to give a cavernous quality to the spaces within the music. But I agree this is being niggardly on my part.

A very good album, quite possibly a classic of the early 1970s independent / psychedelic / hard rock scene in Japan. *Satori* is one of three albums FTB recorded and released during the band's duration; the first album, I hear, is noteworthy for being a mostly covers album with a front cover showing a photo of the band travelling starkers on motorbikes down the highway.

JENNIFER HOR 15/03/2005
www.radioactiverecords.com

FINNISH folk and PSYCH music

Kemialliset Ystävät

Alkuhärkä

FINLAND FONAL RECORDS FR-33 CD (2004)

Since I first heard of this band and this record, I've been pestering Metropolis and Synaesthesia to get copies and now my impatience has been rewarded. Everything I've seen and heard about *Alkuhärkä* is true: it is indeed an extraordinarily magical experience, conjured from another dimension by woodland sprites working through KY leader Jan Anderzen and his many friends (including Sami Sanpakkila of Es / Fonal Records, Merja Kokkonen of Islaja and New Zealander Campbell Kneale among others) over whom the little folk have cast their spells. All 18 tracks on this recording are quite short of which several have repetitive or overlapping melodies and others consist of linked sound fragments, chants and fragile tunes, all more or less segueing from one to another effortlessly as though to convey the gist of the music in a relay; the effect creates a mostly organic patchwork offering partial views into a fairy universe more real than the one at the bottom of your garden or down the local bunnies' underground hang-out. The music is robust and amazingly clear (each instrument, be it piano, organ, violin, maracas, hand drums, whatever, can be heard distinctly no matter how distorted the sound) despite the apparently 'naive' playing and basic production.

'Ah' I hear you cry, 'so many pieces of music! - which are the best, then?' Well, children, they're all really good and different from one another, and no matter how often you listen to them, they're all very bewitching and hint at mysterious and unplumbed depths below the innocent sonic surface sheen. It becomes a matter of what appeals to you most. The opening track certainly is a delicate fragmentary snapshot of twilight insect noises, crystalline guitar waterfall and weird alien calls. 'Kiimaniityn Kutsu' has a ghostly ambience in its echoes and overlapping tunes, one of which seems to be played on a ukulele or similar-sounding instrument. The little folk of the woods play drums and dance in 'Kuu Kostaa' but shyly retreat before a mosquito guitar whine. The singing on tracks like 'Kirppusaari', 'Alkuhärkä' and 'Etanapolku' is unearthly, yet stems directly from the source of all life. Things start looking spacey on 'Koirien Kasvattama' but are brought back to earth with a plaintive flute melody. 'Kamelin Hikea' features a pulling drone that might have come from some strange hybrid offspring of bagpipes and organ (such things are possible among the woodland folk) overlaid by piano while voices natter in the background. The last track is cute and clunky but then a sudden guitar squall closes off the invisible door to the KY kaleidoscope and it's all over. Waaah!

Fret not and dry your tears for your homework is to try and get a copy of this album and listen to it as many times as you wish: each time you hear it you'll swear a new layer of supernatural wisdom has been revealed. A true work of beauty and art.

JENNIFER HOR
05/05/2005
www.fonal.com
fonal@fonal.com

Aavikko

History of Muysic: selected non-album material 1995 - 2003

GERMANY 9PM RECORDS CD 9PM 027 (2003)

This anthology contains a collection of no longer available pieces and unreleased tracks spanning 8 years of cheesy soundtrack lounge electronica from Finnish trio Aavikko, starting off with a cassette tape recording of 'Sibiri' at the band's first rehearsals way back when. Titles like 'Alas Volgaa' and 'Krakovan Niityt', from the band's first 7' release, the now out-of-print 'Aavikko', seem to indicate a fascination with Russian and Polish pop music tunes and indeed the early music itself, which I find the most interesting and enjoyable of the entire CD, is an eccentric mixture of Slavic pop melodies and 1960s lounge electronica with a paella / spaghetti western feel from the same period, all performed on primitive electronic keyboards and drum-kits courtesy of Casio, Yamaha and Akai among other famous 1980s suppliers of cheap electronic musical instruments. Best tracks from this period (and of the whole compilation) are 'Oblomovin Henki' and Cafe Panama' which boast breathless mechanical Latin American ballroom dancing rhythms and classy tunes performed with plenty of zest: the only complaint I have about these is that at less than 3 minutes each, they're far too short!

The 'Oriental Baby' mini-CD, released in 1999, sees in a broader musical palette encompassing Middle Eastern and other ethnic sounds and rhythms mixed with jazzy brass tunes, disco bounce, hints of outer space exotica and lounge music in a way that suggests a soundtrack to a 1960s spy movie - all done with the same primitive electronic instruments and analogue recording technology. The outer space elements are stronger on the Felix Kubin collaboration particularly on 'Antarktis ...' where the boys seem to want to replicate the sound of a theremin with their instruments! All meant to be very silly but, as observed in Ed Pinsent's review in TSP#10, the music is not really all that wacky and the band's reputation for wackiness is still rooted more on the early music than on what was to come later.

After 2000, the music continues to move closer to the electronic pop mainstream: their collaboration with Mono Pause 'Of Stomping Men' sees both bands paying homage (sort of, I think) to Kraftwerk. By the time we reach the last track, 'Eye of the Leopard', featuring Guantanamo prison escapee Kabar whom the boys met in Las Vegas (appropriately), Aavikko have well and truly hit the pop mainstream with a TV theme tune, a BBC John Peel session, their own label Muysic for Peoples and several tours including a 21-date coast-to-coast US tour under their belts. Alas, it hasn't been all party entertainment the whole way: original member Antti Koivumaki left the band in the late 90s and died in 2002. Generally I prefer the early, more eclectic music which has a lot more vigour and easy-going fun than some of the later music which at times strains to be funny (the last track in particular seems really contrived and quite embarrassing to all involved) and the party atmosphere appears forced. Still this anthology is a good introduction to the eccentric if not really very demented psychedelic party pop circus that is Aavikko.

JENNIFER HOR 26/04/2005
www.9pm-records.de

Avarus
Ruskeatimantti
USA TUMULT RECORDS TM319 2 X CD (2005)

Praise be to the Lord! Truly we are blessed that, inspired by a word from somewhere up above, San Francisco-based label Tumult Records (or tUMULt Records as they like to call themselves) have put together this collection of now out-of-print CD-Rs and one 7' recording documenting the musical wanderings of Finnish psychedelic folk troupe Avarus since its formation in 2001. This gift is truly overwhelming and best experienced by allowing it to wash over and drown you in its otherworldly ambience innumerable times before you try to puzzle out which track is which. Primitive banging of sticks and metal happily coexist with mysterious drones arising from the ether, guitars and electronics rub friendly shoulders and everything galumphs along in a seemingly free and easy way. Some of the music is actually supposed to be dark and on the sinister side but I cannot find anything approaching twilight even after many repeated listenings; certainly shamanic and ritualistic elements are present but the communal nature of the music and the shambolic and naive approach adopted by the musicians seem to negate any unsettling tendencies.

The first disc features two CD-Rs originally released in 2001: *Posum Ekor Kait Dataran* and *Horuksen Keskimmaisen Silman Mysteerikoulu*, the first CD-R having two longish pieces and the second CD-R containing 12 quite short pieces, many of which are not much more than bare skeletons of rhythm experiments and textures awaiting some further embellishment. Some tracks (track 9 being a good example) are so strange and unearthly that their simple structures, deliberately lo-fi production and naive delivery, which alone might be excruciatingly twee on other records and in other contexts, seem not so here. I find the most outstanding feature of this disc is the band's use of space, especially on the short tracks; also and perhaps paradoxically for this kind of supposedly sprawling music there is a discipline or restraint at work (unconsciously perhaps, though Avarus are known to cut their jams) that lets the music go on long enough and far enough so it never gets boring or embarrassing.

The second disc holds two CD-Rs and the 7' release; some friends join the band to pound the drums and help out here and there. Here the music becomes very droney and trance-like and lifts the listener to a different plane of existence; in particular 'Sataa Nuuskaa' and parts of 'Maximum Highway Lifestyle' feature the heavy-duty stomping that established Avarus's reputation as the heaviest of the Finnish free-form collectives. Whereas on the previous CD the music could be compared to that of, say, Ashtray Navigations and Birchville Cat Motel among many others, here the more obvious comparisons are with Vibracathedral Orchestra, The Dead C and some of the old 70s German psychedelic rock bands like Can and Faust; indeed, there are so many points of reference one could refer to that it would be exhausting to list even a fraction of them. Once again, there's a certain restraint, a sense of balance, at work throughout. Many will find this 2nd disc the better of the two for the tribal music and the very long 'A-V-P' which is very transcendental and hypnotic. Ah, to float away forever borne on a sea of guitar noise bliss ...

Blessings and much good fortune and all the great records in the universe (past, present and future) be upon Andee Connors of Aquarius Records who saw fit to release this precious jewel on his label tUMULt: so many treasures here in *Ruskeatimantti*, it's impossible to list all of them, you just have to get this record! Then you too will turn into a gabbling freak and grow long hair and a long beard (girls too!), and want to live in the woods with the elves and pixies ...

JENNIFER HOR 05/05/2005
www.tumult.net

Avarus
Jattilaisrotta
FINLAND LAL LAL LAL RECORDS NO NUMBER CD (2004)

Here are ten short pieces that sound like one long extended jam, give or take the odd break between tracks, with an emphasis on creating trancey, hypnotic soundscapes in a slipshod, almost garagey way. Primitive rock-out thump-thumpery gives way to a murky 1950's-style sci-fi kind of soundtrack which is then submerged beneath a rain of electronic bleeps followed by an army of hillbillyish banjo-players. The strange juxtaposition of different styles of music, sort of like the Ozarks in outer space one moment and then a muffled 1960's cocktail lounge the next, winding up eventually in an ongoing stomp, is sure to have listeners scratching their heads and wondering what these freaky Finnish freak-outs will do next. However strange it gets, there's always a certain steadiness at work: nothing ever becomes overwhelming or overdone and the musicians don't flog a pattern or a piece so much that it gets stale (when a certain amount of time has passed, the music is cut off). Certainly there are pros and cons to this approach: if you like to be carried far, far away by the music, you'll have to look elsewhere as Avarus's music is mostly quite sane and grounded; one could argue though that it's not necessary for this kind of communal, intuitive music to have to sweep everyone off their feet and into the wild blue yonder and this goal isn't the only goal such music should pursue.

The incarnation of Avarus that recorded this album (Avarus's first proper full-length release, incidentally) included rising elfin star Merja Kokkonen of Islaja who doesn't appear to sing anywhere on the recording (there are voices on one track but they're very much in the background) plus regulars Roope Eronen, Arttu Partinen and Kevin Regan among others. The album title refers to a stage of drunkenness.

JENNIFER HOR 20/09/2005
www.haamu.com/lallallal/

Kemialliset Ystävät
Kellari Juniversumi
FINLAND FONAL RECORDS FR-21 CD (2002)

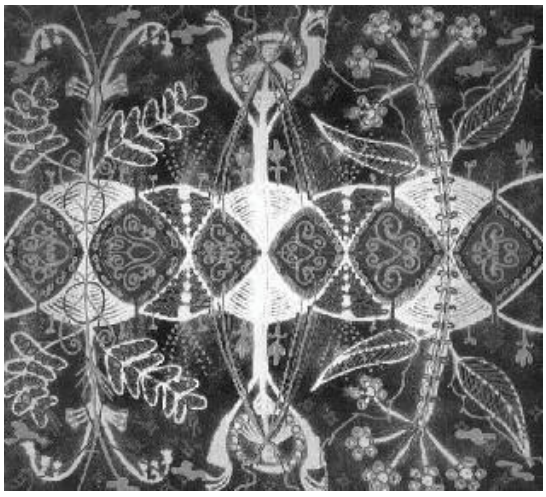
Kemialliset Ystävät
Lumottu Karkkipurkki (Vapaa Systeemi)
FINLAND FONAL RECORDS FR-38 CD (2005)

Kemialliset Ystävät
Latvasta Laho
NEW ZEALAND CELEBRATE PSI PHENOMENON NO NUMBER CD (2005)

The fairies must have thought well of my *Alkuhärkä* review to have batted not one but THREE more of the Finnish psychedelic folksters' releases my way. (With all these wonderful CDs falling from the sky, it's no wonder my noggin is all out of shape.) Fonal Records have been kind enough to reissue two of the band's earlier albums in response to the worldwide interest in KY and their friends. Compared to *Alkuhärkä*, these early releases seem less cohesive in themselves but they're still worthy of your time and attention and the artwork on *Kellari Juniversumi* which features a new booklet of colourful neo-primitive paintings (owners of the original CDs must now be killing themselves!) is worth the price of the CDs together.

Lumottu Karkkipurkki (Vapaa Systeemi) seems the most experimental of what I have heard so far from KY: chief KY person Jan Anderzen and his friends play an assortment of instruments including toys, mandolin and other knick-knacks in the spirit of almost total amateurism and the result

is a mostly shambolic if a little fragmented recording with hints here and there of the beauty the band is usually famous for. It sure takes a lot of musical ability and talent to make a record so apparently naive yet so assured! Every instrument can be heard clearly and the production is very crisp.



Kellari Juniversumi seems a darker recording and bears comparison with some of the Australian psychfolk people like Brothers of the Occult Sisterhood and Terracid, especially on the title track. As with *Lumottu ...*, the tracks are short and repetitive but the musicianship is 'better' or at least less 'naive' with more flowing melodies. If you had to choose between *Kellari ...* and *Lumottu ...* (gasp! if you can afford to, wouldn't you rather have BOTH?!), I'd say go with *Kellari ...* as you'll get crystal-clear sounds, lots of space and beautiful melodies (indeed, this might be KY's most beautiful and melodious recording) plus a communal spirit not apparent on the other recording. The mood at times can be a little foreboding and winter beckons at the end, yet even then there's a bright if somewhat unearthly sparkle that sort of seems hopeful and optimistic.

The artwork on *Latvasta Laho* may be a let-down (it's that kitschy floral wallpaper look beloved of Celebrate PSI Phenomenon - main man Campbell Kneale must have grown up in a house full of it) but KY are as consistent as ever with regard to the structure of the music and its clarity. One major difference is that some tracks seem longer than on previous KY albums; another is that most of the singing is now being done by US guests Wooden Wand and his friend Satya Sai Baba which for some people may detract somewhat from KY's elfin charm (not that I'm complaining - the tracks WW and SSB feature on are among the better pieces on the album) and exoticism. At this point on KY's evolution - we have now arrived at KY album no 5 - the repetition and steady pace of the music are starting to get a little wearying and some variation in the pace of the music and a move away from constantly repeating melodies and loops, however entertaining they are (the groaning on track 5 is amusing but up to a point), and a daredevil approach to experimenting with found sounds would be welcome. I suppose since repetition is standard for KY now, the 'group' (it's basically Jan Anderzen's solo project plus various friends and helpers) could experiment with the way it's done: distorting it, speeding it up, slowing it down, fuzzing it, whatever is possible, and KY may still forge ahead as a leader in the Finnish psychfolk scene.

While *Latvasta Laho* is consistently good (tracks 4, 5 and 7 are the best and Wooden Wand's nutty declaiming on 'Black Holes' is really funny) and indications abound that if KY were to go down a slightly noisier, drone path or off into outer space they'd do pretty well, I think Jan Anderzen has arrived at a crossroads with KY (I guess that's why quite a few foreigners are on board for this CD) and one hopes he's brave enough to leap into the unknown and knock us all sideways. Being on Celebrate PSI Phenomenon may expose KY to a greater variety of influences and approaches so it should be interesting to see what KY make of this connection; maybe their next release will end up on CPSIP's little sister label Battlecruiser!

JENNIFER HOR 13/09/2005
www.cpsip.co.nz
www.fonal.com

Uton

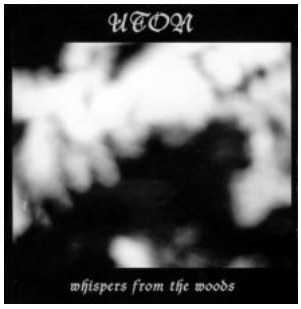
Whispers From The Woods

USA LAST VISIBLE DOG LVD 068-70 3 x CD (2005)

Nothing much is known about Uton, although they appear to be a Finnish combo, and this triple CD set from American label Last Visible Dog is a collection of three of their early LPs, plus bonus cuts taken from compilations (including *Cottage Industrial*, and something on Melting Works) and a smattering of unreleased tracks. Given scarcity and low visibility of the original issues (I never heard of Uton before, not that that's saying much), this collection may be performing quite a service for lovers of the obscure. The original LPs were called *Tämän Ganan Jälkeen*, *Mikä Rasvaa Maan Gisällä*, and *Ay Um Au Lam*; they surfaced, presumably in very limited quantities, on the Haamumaa, Hammasratas and Jewelled Antler labels between 2002-2003.

Uton themselves likewise keep a low profile – no personnel names, no recording session dates, no photos on covers – nonetheless they manage to project the desired image of a weird acid-folk improv collective. The music throughout all three CDs maintains a remarkable consistency – mostly twiddly, scrapey, formless material, without tunes; its vagueness acquires a slightly cosmic tinge when recorders and flutes are added, a slightly edgy feel when violins are darkly scraped. Everything they do is solemn, slow and processional; they rarely use vocalists, although I did come across a snatch of wordless wailing on track 6 on the first CD. In all of its infinite noodling, their work does create something of a 'timeless' feel, infinite stretches of unknown dimensions opening up to the curious traveller.

The forest imagery in the title extends to the cover photographs, comprising arty smeared images of woodland vistas and mysterious wooden sculpture constructs erected in said woodlands. This of course comes within an ace of aping the imagery of the *Blair Witch Project* movie, something instantly overused as a touchstone for 'pagan cool' by the time said movie was released, but I think we have to give a little more credit to Uton. Is not the mythology of the forest deeply rooted in their history and culture? Certainly, you can feel the Nordic climes in every note of their dreary music; their very bones are steeped in the chill, the damp, the long nights and the endless gloom. I've no doubt they would also like an eerie, vaguely supernatural tone to be perceived in their work, and this too is commendably understated; at least I'd like to think so, I haven't had the track titles translated. The artwork on the discs picks up the themes; one of them bears a magic rune symbol, another is decorated with grain of wood texture.

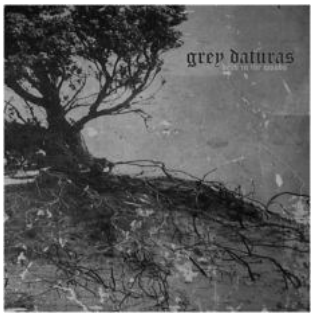


Early listenings have yet to reveal substantial differences between the music on these three discs, although the second CD is a lot scrapier and there may be something electronic (used very sparingly, of course) added to the basic formula; and one track has a slightly edgier electric guitar than normal. All the same, at three CDs there is a lot of this music to listen to; and not quite enough musical shape or solidity for this listener to latch onto. It's like being offered five varieties of home-made porridge, each bowl lumpier than the previous one. Musical substance quotient quite low; ambience and atmosphere levels very high. Lack of drumming may mean this won't appeal to the No-Neck / JOMF audience, although it might sit more comfortably alongside the work of My Cat Is An Alien, if you care to substitute mysterious creepy trees for space aliens as the linking subtext/imagery.

A beguiling witchery awaits the purchaser of this collection. If you also feel three CDs of it is excessive, then consider this length is necessary simply to prove how big the universal forest is...wander in the woods and get lost. Your reference points will be effaced, your memory will be sapped, and you'll never come out alive!

ED PINSENT 25-27/07/2005
www.lastvisibledog.com

CONTEMPORARY MUSIC FROM AUSTRALIA



Grey Daturas

Dead in the Woods

AUSTRALIA CRASHING JETS CJ004 CD (2004)

The album title might be *Dead in the Woods* but the music is very much alive, fresh and kicking thanks to the improvisational approach this Melbourne-based trio has adopted. Very mean and moody throughout the recording, the style of the band veers from near-drone doom metal ('Golden Gate Blues' and 'My Sciatica') to atmospheric post-rock ('A Japanese Romance') to guitar noise ('Running Amok with Knives') and even to near-experimental and ambient on a few tracks. Something of the spirit of psychedelic rock is present through this record which the band acknowledges in an indirect way with titles like 'Night of the Barricade: Paris 1968' and 'For Huey P. Newton and Bobby Seale'. As the CD progresses, you realise this band's style is hard to pin down in any one particular category (note that I've said the group is 'near' this and 'near' that) although most tracks are one thing or the other and not a blend of two or more genres. At 67 minutes in length the CD can be quite exhausting: this would be the only aspect of the recording that might put off many people from hearing the entire album. Some very short and unstructured pieces like 'Who's gonna fill them shoes?' do get a bit lost in that sprawl.

Some people will note there are two boys and a girl in the band so they'll probably think of GD as an Australian Boris which I suppose is apt in a way seeing the droney doom tracks tend to stand out more in the absence of melodies and pop hooks. However if you're looking for comparisons to other acts, I suggest you think more of *Yeti*-period Amon Düül 2 or Parsson Sound (International Harvester in their heavy minimalist jazz/psychedelic/rock phase) and probably even some of Asahito Nanjo's projects during their more controlled and less hypersonic moments.

I won't envy the trio when they decide to record a follow-up as *Dead ..* (GD's second album) will be a very hard act to follow; I think though any follow-up should be shorter with fewer and longer pieces that could alternate between pure improvisation and slightly more structured music. Apart from this, the band can do whatever it likes; the group cites a number of acts such as Sonic Youth, Earth, John Coltrane and Darkthrone as influences so the potential to go in any direction is great. I foresee *Dead ...* will gain in stature over the years with many people considering it a classic so if future GD releases don't quite match up to this recording, it won't be for lack of trying, it'll simply be because the band set the bar astronomically high in the first place!

JENNIFER HOR 15/06/2005
www.crashingjets.com
www.greydaturas.cjb.net

Whitehorse

Live - Oct / Nov 2004

AUSTRALIA PRIVATE PRESSING CD (2004)

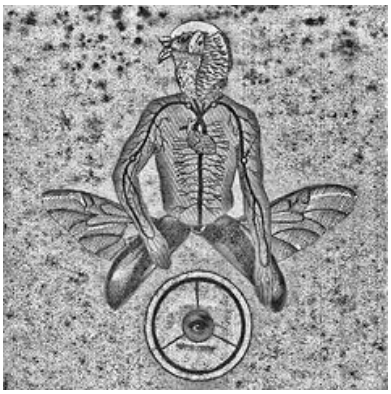
Well! Should your ticker run out and you need to make a grand exit in a huge lacquered box borne aloft by gaunt pallbearers in garments of colours deeper than black while clouds of blood-red mist rise from a toxic scorched earth and some suitably funereal music is called for, why, look no further than this dirgey recording from Melbourne group Whitehorse: here is subterranean sludgehammer music so dense a teaspoon of it would weigh a tonne. As the CD's title suggests, the music divides into two tracks recorded on two separate occasions in different Melbourne venues in 2004 by slightly differing personnel. 'West of the Sun' is a harsh and highly distorted piece (well, the entire CD features highly distorted music with shiploads of feedback) which builds with sluggish and implacable repetition, high guitar whistles whirling overhead, into a crazed percussion break-out followed by morose wavering drones that barely hold the track together. Deep guitar growls lead into the second half of the piece in which can be heard screams of humans abandoned in a world ravaged by wars and pestilence. A chaotic feedback freak-out worthy to stand beside the work of various Asahito Nanjo / Makoto Kawabata combos concludes the piece: strings groan in agony, percussion collapses in self-destructive hysteria and high guitar melodies screech and keen on the edge of the pain threshold.

While 'West ...' perches on the edge of noisy improvisatory territory close to The Dead C at their most garagey, the second track 'Ocean turns to Black' keeps firm company in the same unholy pit as Boris, Corrupted, Khanate and SunnO))) - jeez, what parties they must have down there - though perhaps the sound is not that crusty; riffs that haven't seen the light of day since UK doomsters Cathedral released their masterpiece debut *Forest of Equilibrium* in 1991 now parade in all their solemn decayed glory. Mother Earth groans, volcanoes in far-off lands rumble and Australia moves about 3 centimetres closer to Japan. Throughout this piece there's an atmosphere of sheer desolation borne of global catastrophic devastation, of fires that scourged entire continents, of clouds that rained hot corrosive acid and of dust storms that brought radioactive dust from afar. Occasional guitar melodies lighten the mood but otherwise it's a really depressive and noisy slab of lava that leaves you feeling all unclean and damned to Hell.

Your senses will be so clobbered and numb that you'll be almost ready to meet your Maker after 40-plus minutes. I can't even begin to imagine what a full-length album from this band would be like; presumably when I get it home it'll gouge a huge hole in the floor as it disappears down, down, down into its natural home, so intense the music would be. What

it would do to me once I hear it, I shudder to think: my DNA is sure to unravel, leaving me a quivering mess of amino acids and protoplasmic ick.

JENNIFER HOR 13/05/2005
getonthehorse@hotmail.com
www.aquariusrecords.org
www.synrecords.com (last time I looked, they had some copies)



Brothers of the Occult Sisterhood

Animal Speak
AUSTRALIA
MUSICYOURMIND WILLLOVEYOU
NO NUMBER CD-R (2004)

'Twould seem the fairies who generously spread their magic glitter over Finland, New Zealand and the United States had plenty to spare so they flew over Australia and sprinkled their silvery largesse over the south-eastern part of the country from which the brother / sister duo Brothers of the Occult Sisterhood have emerged and proceeded to record an astonishing number of free-form psychedelic folk music CD-Rs, which have recently come to international attention and of which *Animal Speak* is but a small sample. Some of the music on this disc is similar to that of Kemialliset Ystavat: there are repetitions or overlappings of rhythms and melodies, faint voices singing in secret and not-so-secret languages and fragile melodies. The appearance of the cello on 'Swallowed Hole' recalls Black Forest / Black Sea in a more unstructured and chaotic mode; ghosts of The No-Neck Blues Band also appear in the percussive busyness of this track. If you've come to expect tribal ritualistic music in the genre, you won't be disappointed with 'Quetzalcoatl's Return' which combines a continuous repetitive drumming structure with shimmering drones, all very light and glimmery and bewitching.

The highlight of the recording is 'Sericule', a long and very trancey piece with constantly reiterating guitar riffs and rhythms, disembodied voices calling from afar and very delicate atmospheric effects of the sort that used to pepper mid-'70's Amon Düül II albums (courtesy of keyboardist Falk Rogner) and which were undoubtedly the best thing about those records. Indeed, the entire track recalls some of the haphazard collective spirit of the original Amon Düül commune as well as *Yeti*-period AD2 with the added bonus of stead if not metronome-precise percussion: the only time in history the Amon Düül people and Can coexisted agreeably! The whole atmosphere of this track seems quite special too, slightly 70s in its spacey feel but also very bright and sharp.

Other tracks to watch out for are 'The Light of Life' which is dark and uneasy in its melodies and singing; 'I would rarther live on the Sun' (sic) in which the wee folk appear to be using radio waves to convey their instructions while drones vibrate around them; and perhaps the weirdest track 'Birds of Interspace' which features the most crystalline, fragile and fey music to be found on this CD, with violins and other strings chattering in their own language - see, the fairy dust is concentrated in the very instruments themselves!

Amazing that this group and other people like it (ffehro, Terracid, The Lost Domain and Stuart Busby among others) have been operating under my radar screen in my own backyard for some time and I never knew it ... but I guess this is how the shy little folk like to work: beavering away at the music away from prying eyes and then flying off to who knows where next just before someone sits up and takes notice. What the little people leave behind is treasure more valuable than all the gold and precious jewels in the world. A highly recommended record, this.

JENNIFER HOR 23/05/2005
PO Box 729 Kyogle NSW 2474 Australia
mymwly@hotmail.com

ffehro

The Zeventean Frothing Cardinals
AUSTRALIA MUSICYOURMINDWILLLOVEYOU
MYMWLY0013 CD (2005)

Recorded apparently during the dying days of one Karol Wojtyla who according to juicy Internet rumours once worked as a sales representative for the German chemical company IG Farben and in that capacity sold Zyklon B - hydrogen cyanide to the Nazi German government, and later entered the Roman Catholic priesthood to avoid being arrested and tried as a war criminal (and the rest as they say is history), hence the title of this recording. It's a very busy and rather skittery affair at first with much sawing of violins, tapping of cymbals and tuning, testing and prepping of various other acoustic-sounding instruments for some great event. A discernible rhythm starts about the ninth minute. An exotic air floats over the recording in parts, especially in the twanging of what might be a lute or cithara and in the rumbles beneath the constant activity; we have the feeling a major religious ceremony is about to take place. In the background, a voice ululates. Echoes abound. Strange noises seesaw. Acoustic guitar notes wander about idly. Gradually the music calms down and a drummer starts thumping out a new rhythm.

Round about the 20th minute, the acoustic guitar starts picking out a new tune while eerie sounds whoosh about. We get some washed-out singing while the strange noises and echoes continue to zap all over the place. It seems sort of psychedelic in a really stoned-out / washed-out way, even the tones and effects have a watery impermanent quality to them. The music fades out gradually, a flute and rumbling drums pick up the thread to be replaced by a gong. Throughout this section, drones and various subtle echoes and effects continue. At the end, a throb leads straight into a howling, shrieking trumpet and something of grim horror flashes by briefly.

The overall impression I have is of a naive Western tourist entering a town in a remote kingdom and watching an ancient ritual steeped in rich tradition, seeing troubadours entertaining crowds wearing their best holiday costumes and jewellery, smelling the burning incense and the perfumed water being sprayed over people, and watching girls throw coloured rice and streamers. Markets are full of the noise of haggling merchants and shoppers. Children play games on the cobblestone streets. Then the religious procession proper begins and our tourist is soon swept up in the parade. The whole thing culminates in a terrible sacrifice to a black-skinned deity with blood-stained fangs and necklaces of skulls and bones adorning its body. Guess who drew the short straw to be offered to the appetite of the idol?

JENNIFER HOR 28/06/2005
mymwly@hotmail.com
http://mymwly.blogspot.com

Various Artists

Sound Surrounds Us (Volume 1)
AUSTRALIA MUSICYOURMINDWILLLOVEYOU
MYMWLY0004 CD (2004)

Various Artists

Sound Surrounds Us (Volume 2)
AUSTRALIA MUSICYOURMINDWILLLOVEYOU
MYMWLY0015 2 X CD (2005)

Totalling over 3 hours of music, these recordings present a snapshot of

the psychfolk improv music scene in Australia: ten 'acts' are featured on these compilations with all artists on Volume 1 also featuring on Volume 2 and some of these groups may share members as well so it would seem we are covering quite a small scene. Quite a variety of music is featured on these CDs although as with most compilations some acts are better than others and quite often the music selected seems not to be the best of the particular artists featured nor is it their most representative.

On *Volume 1*, there are only three acts featured (Brothers of the Occult Sisterhood, ffehro and Terracid) and though individually the tracks they offer are good, put together they make for an album that can be a bit of an ordeal to sit through: each track is very long - the minimum length is 15 minutes - and tends to involve a gradual build-up of darkish mood that to some listeners may not resolve in a satisfactory climax, depending on what they expect out of improv music. The tracks have pretty good titles though: BOTOS's offering, 'Three Waves of Industrial Meth', while it turns out to be less alarming and a lot smoother than the title would suggest, is a pleasant-ish ramble with a ghostly moaning drone somewhere; ffehro's '25 Lateral Sludge Days' is a lot shadier and the territory is one where the ugly relatives of fairy-folk feel more at home and travellers must beware but just as the preceding track doesn't have much of what I'd call 'industrial meth', so too this piece doesn't have the 'sludge' I'm familiar with (and I don't just mean the stoner rock / doom metal / doom drone kind of sludge) and the track is merely threatening. Terracid's wonderfully named 'Absorbed Forever into the Zenith of Her Numerous Jackals' likewise isn't as psychotic or disordered as the title promises - indeed, the piece is very ordered, even stately - but the atmosphere is very unsettling and is possessed of an ethereal alien strangeness, quite absorbing with wonderful chiming noises and rich tones over neo-primitive drums: this is easily the best track on offer here.

If you don't have or can't get a copy of *Volume 1* but can get *Volume 2*, you'll find the above-mentioned artists on the 'cinis' CD of the double set offering better tracks: the BOTOS track 'eat your thirst' has very amusing passages of shambolic trumpet-playing and mucking around with children's nursery tunes; and Terracid's raucous and noisy 'lupine moon', finally living up to and beyond its name, includes some genuinely scary vibrato drone ululations and thunderous rhythms, However the stand-out track on 'cinis' turns out to be Nada and Ove's 'invocation of the pleasure stone, invocation 1', a very hypnotic and rhythmic piece featuring didgeridoo, several small percussion instruments and a fire to give that communal atmosphere: the use of a cave somewhere in northern Sweden as a studio seems more gimmicky than necessary and probably someone had to finger-paint some woolly mammoths on the cave walls to establish the right ambience.

I did not find the 'pulvis' CD as varied or entertaining as 'cinis': the last track by The North Sea in particular seems too long and what sounds like a coda just seems to go on forever (that may have been the intention of course) though the fuzzy texture and spacey mood induced by the discreet effects redeem it somewhat. Probably the best track here is 'sisterschool' by Castings, initially a darkly ambient piece that revs up and down quite a bit and sits for a while in the territory of Hototogisu and recent Birchville Cat Motel offerings before becoming mostly quiet. I expected something lively and robust from 6majik9, having recently bought something of theirs on the Foxglove / Digitalis Industries label and though their contribution has a beautiful sound, still it is also quite sedate and rather too tranquil. The other artists featured on 'pulvis' include the Golden Oaks and Davenport who contribute quite nice but again fairly restrained pieces. Indeed, many pieces seem to merge all too seamlessly into one another.

It should be obvious that of the two volumes described, *Volume 2* is the better and the one I recommend. A number of artists mentioned above have issued CD-Rs and if you come across any of these, they are better again; BOTOS in particular have released quite a lot of recordings in a short period and depending on where you live, hopefully you can obtain these recordings at reasonable prices from your local trusty suppliers.

JENNIFER HOR 02/09/2005
http://mymwly.blogspot.com
mymwly@hotmail.com
www.digitalisindustries.com

Terracid

Transcendental Reign Inheritor
USA FOXGLOVE 058 CD (2004?)

The most wonderfully strange and psyched-out music is to be found here: each track seems to be its own round-the-world musical travelogue in weirdness. A nightmarish acid trip full of swirling yowls that might have come from Edvard Munch's famous painting 'The Scream' if it could, er, sing soon becomes a tiny forest fairy gamelan orchestra. A radio drone full of static finds its place in a jovial hillbilly band's knees-up. A pensive acoustic guitar melody does battle with toddlers playing with pots and pans in the background somewhere while elsewhere an aerodrome is kept busy with comings and goings of extra-terrestrial spacecraft. Much of this music was probably inspired by the same little spirits who of late have been flying all over the world sprinkling magic gold and silver dust over places like Finland and the United States; the difference here is that when some of this glittery shower fell upon Terracid, the musicians at the time must have been suffering the ill effects of a surfeit of homemade hooch flavoured with the wrong kinds of magic mushrooms because the music here definitely sounds really, REALLY strange in a lurching kind of way and the mood is often quite grim and foreboding. The most peculiar rhythms hold up tunes that threaten to disintegrate yet the whole edifice manages to hang together from start to finish as though by ... well, of course, by magic!

Not quite the merger between the psychedelic fairy folk music and the evil black metal music I have been listening to of late but this recording by Terracid is certainly moving towards the territory of long dark shadows, of forbidding weather and landscapes, and of creatures that shun the sunlight and think strange thoughts. The best tracks are the first and last ones: cacophonous, noisy and overwhelming alien orchestral pieces that morph into the most eccentric, jaw-dropping and mind-blowing melodies. Put somewhat more crudely: man, this album is Totally Fucked Up. In the truest sense of the expression. Very highly recommended.

JENNIFER HOR 30/06/2005
www.digitalisindustries.com
mymwly@hotmail.com

Francis Plagne

Idle Bones
AUSTRALIA SYNAESTHESIA syn018 CD (2005)

Some people spend their entire lives trying to create the perfect pop record and never come close to succeeding: the history of Western pop / rock is littered with their names and the mountain-loads of their product that all but the very obsessive have forgotten. Then there are those wonder children who nail the perfect record straight away on their first attempts, often when they are teenagers, and the rest of their careers is a footnote to that early peak of creativity. If you can tear yourselves away from former Wunderkind Kate Bush's latest album *Aerial* for a few moments, may I interest you in *Idle Bones*, the debut full-length album by 17 year old Melbourne artist Francis Plagne? This recording effortlessly combines arty pop melodies that don't follow any rational order and which spring upon you without warning, with elements of musique concrète, noise and improv music. Add to this heady brew lyrics of a stream-of-consciousness sort sung in an untutored boyish voice and a mood that's almost like summer-turning-into-autumn mellowness (and which sometimes descends into fairly dark territory) and we've got here a record that could almost be reminiscent of the Beatles in an alternative yet parallel universe in which Paul McCartney has been sacked and the band, having sorted out its management, forges ahead into the mid-1970s anyway with George Harrison writing the bulk of the classic and catchy tunes we'll never get to hear in our world; yes, a number of Plagne's tracks have that alternative Beatles flavour about them. (Of course, the Beatles might also have gone off on an eccentric Middle Eastern or even reggae-flavoured psychedelic / arty pop trip but that wouldn't necessarily have been a bad thing to do.)

Most tracks are very good though due to the mix of experimental music elements and melodic pop pieces the pace is not even and sometimes the album gives the impression of getting stuck while Plagne mucks about with the interesting bits for longer than he should. Then the track ends abruptly, the sweet pop melody starts up and the record is flowing again. If Plagne can get the experimental music and pop music aspects working together in the same track now and again and include brief episodes of pure experimentation between songs (paying some attention to space and ambience to give the impression of flow), one day he could be as big as Christian Fennesz or bigger. (Here's hoping!) As it is, *Idle*

Bones is a very assured effort that boldly ventures onto the tight-rope between arty pop music and experimental / improv and stays there. The picture of the whistling duck nonchalantly pedalling a unicycle into what looks like treacherous mountain territory with storm clouds gathering above captures the spirit of the recording and maybe something of the artist's attitude.

Fifteen of the sixteen tracks were composed and performed by the artist so that in itself says something about the young musician's creative potential; track 9, 'the next world, and the next', features three other performers including the usually perky Synaesthesia boss Mark Harwood on gloomy-sounding keyboards.

JENNIFER HOR 17/10/2005
www.synrecords.com

Daisuke Suzuki and Brendan Walls

Aftertaste

AUSTRALIA DONOVAN'S HANDS DOHSCD 1001 (2003?)

A good if rather spooky recording that roughly divides into two unequal halves. The first half, a bit quieter and somewhat longer than the second, is dominated by a long drone that seems at once soothing in its bell-like smoothness yet is a little threatening in the way it quivers and goes through various changes of tone. Even the very sonorous sound of the drone can be a little ominous. Ghostly bleats and barely discernible mutterings coming from an ectoplasmic entity with a secret it wants to tell but no language to say it in, appear for a while and then retreat. After about the twelfth minute, rattling noises begin and there is rumble (from treated guitar I think). The second shorter and noisier half of the recording becomes very noisy indeed with crinkly treated guitar noises, deep static and a very urgent drone as though an unseen force is trying to break into our world from its hidden dimension; this is quite a violent section of the track, reminiscent of some of Daniel Menche's work. After the 25th minute, the noises disappear and the drone continues strongly until near the end of the piece.

This recording does concentrate the mind very well with the stark tones and the spaces and silences surrounding the music. I swear there is a spirit wraith in there somewhere and indeed the CD gives a credit to Aiya the ghost. A very abstract and also quite trancey piece with no obvious reference points apart from the ghostly voices signalling that near presence of another world that manages to be very close physically yet very distant on other planes of existence.
JENNIFER HOR 18/10/2005
dhands@tokyonet.com.au

Various Artists (compiled by Oren Ambarchi)

Loose Canon: Sounds from the Australian Experimental Underground

AUSTRALIA NO LABEL 2 x PROMOTIONAL CD (2005)

As indicated by the small print in the inside CD sleeve, this double set represents a fragment and a snapshot of the current underground experimental music scene in Australia; some people I had thought might have been included, like Greg Kingston and Jim Denley, don't appear while a couple of others like Volvox had me thinking, hmm, didn't this act release *The Damage begins at the Mouth* several years ago? - then I check the release date for this record and it only came out some time about 2000. It's a sign of how much the scene has changed that I should think a record that was released only five years ago is already ancient history! By way of background, this compilation was put together quickly by Australian guitarist Oren Ambarchi for the Australia Council for the Arts just before he flew to Japan where among other things he used this double set to help promote Australian experimental music at a forum.

Oren Ambarchi and Chris Townend

All tracks are arranged alphabetically by artist name which actually works better than might be expected as both discs begin quite strongly and end strongly as well, and the spread of different styles of music on each disc is such that noisy people like Marc Fusinato (whose 'Free' is a loud electric guitar drone sounding like a factory next door to an aircraft hangar) and Rev. Kriss Hades (noisy rock with death metal elements) aren't bunched up in one corner fighting for attention and shy quiet types aren't in another corner to be skipped over. The first disc covers musicians in the A - L range of the alphabet and it 's probably significant with regard to the depth and diversity of the scene that although Ambarchi himself has a track featured here from his recent Touch album *Grapes from the Estate*, it doesn't actually stand out much: I single out Beta Erko's 'Otvoren Za Site' (skittery number with Anthony Pateras and Robin Fox on electronics, Martin Ng on turntables and Vulk Makedonski doing voice cut-ups), Rod Cooper's deep atmospheric tone piece 'Pearlite', Fusinato's 'Free' and Will Guthrie's varied 'Spear' (a long piece that at times is quiet and piercingly abstract, and elsewhere crashingly noisy) as the stand-out tracks. Other people appearing on this disc include Clare Cooper, Robin Fox (solo), Alan Lamb (a quiet piece), Robbie Avenaim, Ernie Althoff and Brothers of the Occult Sisterhood.

The second disc covers musicians in the M - W range of the alphabet and their contributions as a group seem slightly stronger than those on the first disc: the best pieces are those by The Necks (nice piano-dominated jazz with a lot of space and mood), Pimmon, Francis Plagne (nice combination of banging garbage tin lids, found sounds and pop melody), Snawklor (trumpet piece with zoo animal noises of which frog burps are most prominent), Thembi Soddell (strong drone track with musique concrete elements), Volvox, Mayo (the poppiest act of the selection, main Mayo-man Chris Townend continuing on from his Sun project with Oren Ambarchi of some years ago; Ambarchi recently has been working with a different lot of Sunn-y people but that's another story to tell!) and Brendan Walls (a strong abstract droning piece). The Menstruation Sisters, Volvox and Wog (Ray Ahn / Robbie Avenaim) gate-crash an otherwise serious party where electroacoustic music, ambient-oriented music and musique concrète come to the fore with a number of contributions by Anthony Pateras and Sean Baxter in various combinations with other musicians and Philip Samartzis featuring on one track as well. Other contributors to the second CD include Stasis Duo and Tarab.

In all, this is a strong selection of musicians representing a diverse scene that unfortunately is ignored by the mainstream music media in Australia most of the time except when the Whatismusic? festival juggernaut rolls around once a year. Many if not most of the artists featured here are probably better known in exotic overseas places than in their own home towns. Quite a few experimental music genres and approaches are represented here on this CD though at the risk of giving myself a black reputation down at Metropolis (and thus not getting the choicest, kvltest black metal cuts), I might note that the extreme heavy rock genres, anything to do with hip-hop / rap and the psych-folk scene are weakly represented on the compilation. Possibly if Ambarchi had had more time to compile his lists, he undoubtedly would have included more than enough artists and genres from all around the country for a 3 x CD set or even a 4 x CD set. I note that a number of contributions to *Loose Canon ...* are edits of longer pieces and possibly if more of these pieces if not the whole tracks had been included, we would have had a better set again.

There is no one common denominator uniting the artists featured on this double set though most tracks do convey an almost palpable sense of adventure and fun and quite a few of the electroacoustic contributions are surprisingly robust.

JENNIFER HOR 24/10/2005
info@orenambarchi.com

NOISES FROM THE USA

Hairy Loons, Guitar Noise, Mad Electronics

Demos Yellow Swans
Live in the Police State Capitol
USA WEIRD FOREST RECORDS 004 LP (ND)

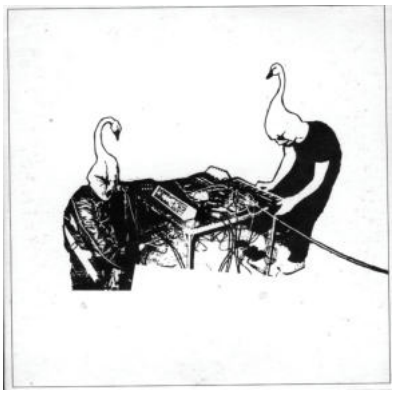
Yellow Swans – definitely my flavour of the month! Pete Swanson and GMS are a guitar / electronics / vocals duo from USA; their brand of cheap scuzzy noise is done with tremendous economy, flair, variety and imagination. Plus, they rock! Two live tracks on this single-sided LP; on the Sacramento cut they deliver a totally brooding episode of fuzzed-up nastified guitar alongside throbbing, analogue oscillations from their demonic synth device. The full-blooded piece snarls out for attention right at the start, and soon builds up into a muddy gumbo of malevolent filth. Great use of moog programming to ring in basic, looped rhythms of white noise or sick-sounding electric goop. You haven't heard such aggressive, mesmeric power electronics since DAF, and they were way too clever in comparison. Ugly, twisted, brutal…not excessively loud, just punchy and effective.

The front cover features an ugly collage of details from muscleman/beefcake photos, an eye-searing sprawl of harsh oranges and reds, cut-up to form a spiral of pumped-up biceps and a clenched-arm Swastika motif at the centre. This Heartfield-esque comment is directed at a certain movie-star muscleman, now Governor of California, and certain remarks attributed to him. Pretty subtle dig by GMS there, who also includes a printed polemic inside which, through word and image, very glibly equates his home country with Nazi Germany. I won't rise to the bait by attempting to refute this line of thinking (or lack of it); I'm just happy that the music contains no such content. On the other hand, perhaps this LP demonstrates the power of libertarian thinking when it's applied to a worthwhile activity – in this case, the efficient production of semi-disciplined, angry noise.

ED PINSENT 16/07/2005
www.weirdforest.com
www.jyrk.com/yellowswans

Dreamed Yellow Swans
Dreamed Yellow Swans
USA PACrec 110 / SWEDEN DELETED ART dLTD011 CD (ND)

Another devastating bash-em-up goodie from this punchy, hopped-up duo of USA noisette upstarts. With truckloads of pulsing, angry clattering plus fierce and bad-tempered droning, this CD goes for the knockout punch every time. Think of two insects in a jar, fierce bitey insects with rasping legs and vicious stings; Yellow Swans have a chip on their shoulder about the size



of the Brooklyn Bridge. Yep, this duo have a tremendous amount of constrained, bottled-up angst and fury, and they spurt it all out on these four tracks in angry wasp-like doses. Punk Rock often claimed to deliver something like this, but was never as ferocious or abrasive. Besides improving on the basic DAF model, Yellow Swans also soup-up the French New Wave school (eg Dr Mix and The Remix, Metal Boys, Metal Urbain) in exciting ways. They have a real heavy rock undercurrent going on beneath the atonal, avant-styled tuneless yawps. Of the four cuts, 'Garrison' and 'Drowning in Paradise' were originally issued on a lathe-cut LP in 2002; 'Gold Rush' and the untitled track were on a split LP recorded with Nice Nice. Now rescued on this compilation, though even this CD is limited and bound to be rare soonish. A good release to snap up and begin your Yellow Swans collection.

ED PINSENT 23/07/2005
www.iheartnoise.com
www.deletedart.org

The Yellow Swans
Bring the Neon War Home
USA NARNACK RECORDS
NCK7017 CD (2004)

This also available: nasty, brutal, loud and garish garage rock, plus wonky synth and drum-machine mayhem. Filled with simple-minded anti-authority statements and much riot-mongering cant!

ED PINSENT 03/09/2005
381 Broadway, 4th Floor, Suite 3, NYC NY 10013, USA

Dead Machines
Human Brain Wasting Syndrome
USA ECSTATIC PEACE! E#100D
LP (2004)

Dead Machines are one of many Wolf Eyes side projects, comprising Tovah O'Rourke and partner John Olson. This full-length LP is completely lovely in all aspects, from its clunky handmade cover to its run-out groove. Compared to the mother band Wolf Eyes, Dead Machines tend to go for a subtler, less aggressive approach to noise, yet remain steeped in unholy, bizarre weirdness; thus I declare they are evolving musically into the epitome of the *Weird Tales* of H P Lovecraft, but urbanised and modernised for our sick age and dosed with present-day angst. Dare to play this record and strange brooding creaks will bewilder your senses, weird wails and bleeps will assault your ears; each strange sound suspended in a suffocating mix that conveys sensation of being trapped on board a submarine, alone and stranded at 20,000 leagues beneath the sea. The B side offers weird cries of alien animals and lost dinosaurs wandering in a lost world. Melancholy wails are issued over a throbbing wall of fuzz. This is a record of deep angst, plucked up by the roots, and torn from the innards; it's the sound of wandering souls drinking deep at the well of unknown fears.

Two pieces of corrugated card in a bag, with pasted on colour xerox artworks, comprise the sleeve art for this unique beast. The artworks are grungy collage statements, with twisted scrawled lettering and carefully-painted outlines in white; the final product so demented it resembles the art of outsider psychopaths. The back cover has a Francis Bacon-styled screaming man, with a dismembered face and scattered body parts, lurking in an uncertain field of paint-splattered grey murk. With their extremely primitive and simple electronics, this duo perform curious explorations of unknown territories of the mind, probing dusty dark corners of the brain. They are loopy psychosis-experts, using alien devices. Eccentric they may be, but you'll be pleasantly baffled by the results of their tests. Alienation, misery and turgid noise – what more could a man want?

ED PINSENT 23/07/2005
www.ecstaticpeace.com

The Wooden Cupboard
Boiling The Animal In The Sky
NEW ZEALAND PSEUDOARCANA
PA054 3" CDR (ND)

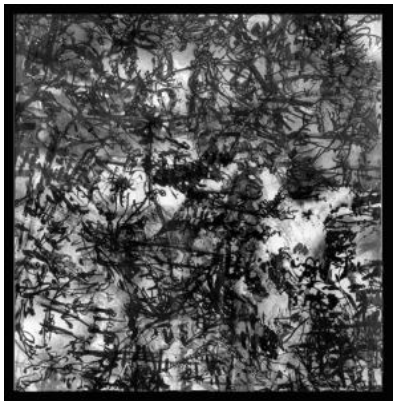
A great slice of bizarre wailing vocals, with lo-fi oddness and energised performing. This project features James Ferraro, also part of the SF duo The Skaters, and it's on Antony Milton's label which is home to many a marginal / underground release. Two cuts, of which the first delivers a weird high wailing voice along with a lower humming voice in the bass register. These voices moan out their indecipherable runes in song-like mode while two or more guitars are being mangled, eviscerated and pulled apart string

by string. The piece is propelled by a delicate, chuntering rhythm, while its simple phrases are basically just repeated over and over. Repetition may be one key to success of this music. A fantastic 'primitive' effect, succeeding effortlessly in delivering that 'tribal' and post-apocalyptic folk music vibe that so many wish to strive for nowadays; but where Sunburned Hand of the Man just sound dumb when they try and put it on, here it seems more natural and joyous. The second cut has more wailing and whooping, but also plenty of crude tape edits which compress a long performance (or lots of unrelated performances) into a stumbling, disjointed yawp of joy. There's drumming, amplifier fuzz, languid guitar strumming, recorders carrying a two-note melody, and plaintive moaning voices. Keeping it dead simple really pays off, as does creating an 'instant' atmosphere with low-fidelity recording techniques. This may all be contrived as heck, but it's hard not to love it! Cover features a nice collage of a beaten gold mask from an ancient culture, with evergreen trees in a blue sky. Zero information inside CD. Be sure to check out The Skaters as well. Very good!

ED PINSENT 16/07/2005
www.sphosting.com/pseudoarcana/pesudo.htm

The Skaters
Dark Rye Bread
NORWAY HUMBUG 044 LP
(2005)

And here are The Skaters. Glorious primordial noise from this San Francisco combo, on a tour-only LP of which the 300-copy pressing has vanished already. On 6 untitled tracks, wrapped in cover art which gives nothing away, the core players James



Ferraro and Spencer Clark are joined by David Bryant. The amazing voice-based sound, mixed with lots of alien electronics, may have its origins in the use of karaoke machines, although others speak of loops, archaic delay units and old and broken amplifiers; the voices are transformed into exploding fireworks, whooping and popping like miniature grenades. Weird percussion effects, very high distortion levels, and a tremendous amount of expressive energy gushing out from behind the clouds of smoke. No wonder this lot are creating such a buzz just now…it's untamed, unkempt, energising and invigorating stuff, and very inclusive too – a welcoming gesture, an invitation to join the communal dance from these crazy wildmen capering about dressed in animal skins in their prehistoric-styled landscapes. Join the raucous fun...playing in the mud, cavorting in the rain…reconnect with you inner Neanderthal self.

Their slightly unusual 'methodology' for music-making is probably one which involves a minimal set-up without too many guitars and drumkits to get in the way of the performers, just mics, effects and amplification, perhaps allowing the liberation of the body during performance. There is certainly a very human core to the music, despite all the amplification and distortion which if you peeled it away would leave you with human voices, humming, singing and whooping. It's a radical approach in anyone's book and this is a grand LP. Not your average dumb noise, there is a lot of warmth, intelligence, and power.

ED PINSENT 03/09/2005
www.tibprod.com/humbug.htm

The Skaters

Palmshaper

FINLAND 267 LATTAJJAA LTJ-30 CDR (2005)

2004 live recordings from Ferraro and Clark on this disc, a soon to be rare artefact of psychedelic underground noise. Check in here for further examples of The Skaters' trademark weird voices of shamanistic proportions, plus droning slide-guitar effects, junkyard percussion so basic you couldn't give it away at a car boot fair, and tons more 'alien' sounds that cannot be digested by human auditory systems. The Skaters are evolving a radically unhinged reinvention of the rock-music collective jam, and it's executed by a mere two players filling in all the conventional gaps by themselves. This one reinforces their extremely infantile approach to music, untutored and naïve, free from ideas of 'art' and more rooted in basic forms of game-play, seeking thereby to get back to a universal, pre-Babel mode of communication when nation spake unto nation using these ghastly wails and whoops. Three tracks, 30 minutes, a short slice of loopy genius.

ED PINSENT 12/09/2005
www.dlc.fi/~hhaahti/267lattajjaa/
hhaahti@dlc.fi

Wooden Wand and the Vanishing Voice

L'un marquer contre la moissonneuse

USA THREE LOBED RECORDINGS TLR 014 CD (2005)

The first official CD release for this US group which so far has released 2 LPs and some cassettes, and it's quite a doozy: two very long sets of all-instrumental psych folk improv jamming alternating with two short sung pieces in a joint attack upon the Grim Reaper. Of the two short pieces, 'Counterfeit Kingdom' is a sort of hillbilly / blues piece, quite sleepy and laid-back in delivery, with a repeating melody and backed by banjo, bubbling sound effects and field recordings of chirping birds. The other song 'Windflower' consists of two unaccompanied male and female voices going up and down the musical scale in the manner of a children's rhyme; the curious thing is that though the track is about redemption from sin and deth, the singing is quite flat and toneless.

The real gems of the album are the two long pieces, both similar in their repetition and in changing from a tentative first half to a beefier second half, yet very different in mood and atmosphere. 'White Fungus Bird's Nest and a Moon Pie' (now where have I come across this 'moon pie' business before?) opens in a lazy manner: a long trumpet drone, an insistent rhythm and various background instruments and shimmery effects lollop by, not doing very much that sounds like battling the Grim Reaper but keeping us amused nevertheless; halfway though, the shimmery stuff takes over and ghostly effects start edging out the whiny drone which puts up a brave if pathetic fight. A bass line and banging triangles shore up defences but the strange effects win the day. 'Bloated Money Elk', a

long set at 25 minutes, is darker and spacey in atmosphere, relying on mysterious echoes and clouds of little grainy tones initially; gradually acoustic guitar is added, then electric guitar, then percussion against a deep and steady drone. A melody is soon established with an accompanying rhythm, repetitive but changing subtly, growing stronger and more confident. Now this really sounds as if the forces of darkness are in retreat! With banjo joining, the track assumes a jaunty air and we soon have a very folksy set with droney touches and sound washouts.

Altogether this is a very enjoyable recording that sits between the communal jammy tendencies of Finnish groups like Avarus and Kemialliset Ystavat and the droney work of US bands Double Leopards (who are friends of WW and VV) and Hototogisu. It's probably not quite what some of us may be used to in epic battles between Life and Death and the final victory is short on pyrotechnical displays and definitive finishes but as the album's title says, a score against the Reaper is a score is a score is a score.

JENNIFER HOR 16/08/2005
www.threelobed.com/tlr
www.woodenwand.sinkhole.net

Gang Gang Dance

God's Money

USA THE SOCIAL REGISTER TSR019 CD (2005)

Gang Gang Dance followed up their eponymous LP on Fusetron with this bizarre release. Where the debut was exceptionally far-out, this one is slightly more reined in, as well-produced and tight as a conventional pop LP in its way, but still packed with plenty of collective loopiness from the mysterious combo. Some of the these new US groups like to go for trancey music of one kind of another; GGD don't go into a trance so much as conspire to go mad together at the same time. The vocalist (a very talented female shrieker and whooper) is much to the fore on this release, apparently aping mad Asian and Cambodian pop records with her stylised vocalising and double-tracked blithering of inspired craziness. The lyrics seem to be gibberish at first, but aren't...follow the transcriptions and make what you may of her heavily disguised messages.

As for the band players, they manage plenty of pseudo-ethnic lilting rhythms that likewise might have been stolen wholesale from

ethnic pop 45s. It's great dance music too. A band that lives up to its own name. With their highly-enjoyable and energetic sound, they're clearly hell-bent on winning their skewed pop-music spurs. They tear into each track as though their lives depended on it, picking up their instruments as though they'd been dipped in hot water...the music gets twice as interesting when they (briefly) go overboard with the freaky effects, rifling with glee whatever digital toys they find available behind the mixing desk. Arrangements are simple and crisp; the rhythm section is basic, holding down a steady spine, while those performers at the top end – voice, keys and guitars – get to have all the mad fun!

The sleeve art meanwhile shows us collaged and cut-up images of US dollar bills, armed soldiers, and Persian carpets. Make what you will of this juxtaposition; might be worth lining this up in an art exhibit with records by The Yellow Swans and Number None just to see who takes home the prize for unsubtle political editorialising. About the third time I've played this now and it's really growing on me, sparkling like new with each listen. Has a great production sound, which is refreshing when so many of these grubby youngsters from the States (step forward Magik Markers) are determined to eschew professional recording techniques as somehow 'inauthentic'. Good songs, unusual structures, eccentric (very) performances and a bright sound. May appeal to fans of The Slits or Family Fodder, though is much more loose-limbed and far-out than either.

ED PINSENT 25/08/2005
www.thesocialregister.com

Magik Markers

I Trust My Guitar, Etc

USA ECSTATIC PEACE E#100e / APOSTASY APO016 / APLP2 VINYL LP (ND)

I'll start with the B side of this LP, one long track called 'Straight As in Love', where this USA trio cop something that sounds like an early Jad Fair title and proceed to bash out some 20 minutes of energetic, fast-paced gibbering mush-noise, that could easily be the genius mutterings of holy fools. Drooling, slobbering, half-played guitars meet up with shambolic, disorganised drumming, both sides exhibiting brilliantly sloppy, drunken playing, and meeting each other halfway on some no-man's land of uncertainty, neither side quite knowing how the other got there. Eventually 'riffs' of a sort do emerge. Suffused energy billows out of the grooves like clouds of mustard gas. Magik Markers aren't the type of dog that goes for your throat, like Mouthus. They just leap up like a big hound with floppy ears, shedding long hairs from their shaggy pelt, and lick you all over with a huge pink tongue.

Paul Flaherty (R), Chris Corsano (L). Photo: Jim Evans.

Peter Nolan, Elisa Ambrogio and Leah Quimby pose for their LP cover in a sequence of photo shots that shows them beating each other up in a park, in various combinations. I've yet to see a better illustration of the essential tragedy of the human condition, and summed up so nicely. These images say something particularly poignant about modern sexual relations, which involve so much ugly assertion and outright violence, and from both sexes. It also says something about their uncertainty as a band; why are they doing it, what do they have to say to each other? Consequently, all the music has an endearing sketchy and scrawly quality in the playing. None of the trio quite know where it's all going, but that doesn't stop them carrying on – and in a very rugged, make-do kind of way. Let's get the job done. Not plodders, like the No-Neck Blues Band who always seem to me like dogged Marines, marching up the hill through the mud in full combat gear, even if it kills them. Magik Markers are more like the Cavalry, taking it all at a headlong tilt, despite having horses with no legs to run on.

The A side has five cuts of varying length; this is their song side, owning a huge debt to post-punk records of the late 1970s. Maybe a bit more 'formal' than the B-side freakout. One distinctive feature is the 'muffled' recording; everything seems much too quiet. You can't even hear the singer as she burbles on frenetically, nor decode a single word. Has the lo-fi pose been taken too far? Soon, you realise this recording approach is deliberate, and makes perfect sense; the emotion is still there, and somehow shines through the murkiness like a guttering green candle flame through the fog. The band's honesty extends to including a 'false start' for one song, as a 0:49 track! The last cut has those amazing 'let's get lost' qualities that lots of US bands would give their AOL accounts to achieve, as it stops, starts, wanders around in a daze, picks itself up and somehow keeps going. More of the latter approach would be very desirable! In short this LP is very good open-ended rambling, atonal, noise/guitar music. I wonder how the heck it got onto Ecstatic Peace?

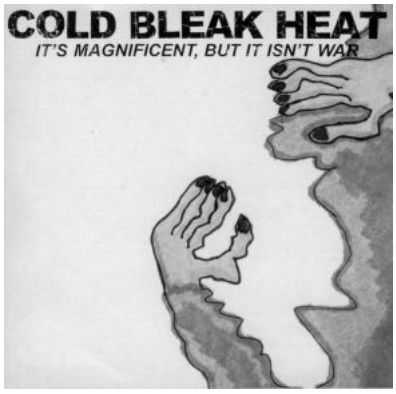
ED PINSENT 28/08/2005
www.ecstaticpeace.com

Cold Bleak Heat

It's Magnificent, But It Isn't War

USA FAMILY VINEYARD FV35 CD (2005)

Great free jazz record...a strong statement by these New England musicians, counted among those we might call free-jazz revivalists. Paul Flaherty of course has never received an unkind word in these pages, or anywhere else to my knowledge; he being the veteran sax player with a big white beard, a figure who's a (relatively) undiscovered hero to whom all the young jazz buffs flock, not only to lay down a 'jam' but also to cherish him as a rare gem in the Connecticut Delta. Plus there's Chris Corsano, the skinny drummer who's a regular sparring partner of Flaherty, ubiquitous among many underground 'scenes' in the US. There's Greg Kelley, the



trumpeter, forsaking his usual minimalism and avant malarkey to blow his notes like any hard bopper; and Matt Heyner from No-Neck Blues Band on the bass. CD comes in at a generous 65 mins, 7 cuts, recorded in Westwood MA during August 2003. Music is all hot free jazz, played with authority, utterly convincing. Players all locked into groove, pedal to the floor, giving it everything they have in their bandoliers and their money belts. All titles plug into life-affirming themes – Live for Infinity, Love Conquers All, Raising The Dead...and for good measure, a couple of 'tough guy' sentiments are thrown in, to appease the battling ghost of Jackson Pollock, to wit 'Never Give Em What They Want' and 'Is That All You Got?', both maxims which Flaherty no doubt lives his life by. Just ask his barman.

At best, this combo remind you of the better Albert Ayler ensembles – and that is saying something. They have the same wayward quality, the wispy sounds, the wobbly off-centre playing which betokens the strategic avoidance of a single tonal key (why settle for one when you can have many); and the general hinting at matters spiritual, matters dark and unknown. Flaherty blows free; he shines as the most inventive of the collective talent here, and in places goes genuinely 'out' and crazy in the way of best free jazz. Corsano is a marvel, one of the strongest and most natural drummers you could think of. The bass player is good too. Only Greg Kelley lets the side down. Ever so slightly, he is calling attention to himself on this sesh. He goes for virtuoso playing when not called for; he is imitative of known sounds (eg Don Cherry); he strives for effects, where the other players strive for group communication. But that's a quibble; maybe it's always going to be imitative in some way to play free jazz (a 1960s idiom) in 2003, but these guys have made it a musical form that's all their own, and they do it darned well too. Plus, it's one of the least processed sounding records you'll find reviewed in this issue. Whatever happened to acoustic playing? Double plus, it has cover art by Flaherty; triple plus, sleeve notes by Dredd Foole. Improves the more you listen. Procure.

ED PINSENT 23/08/2005
www.family-vineyard.com

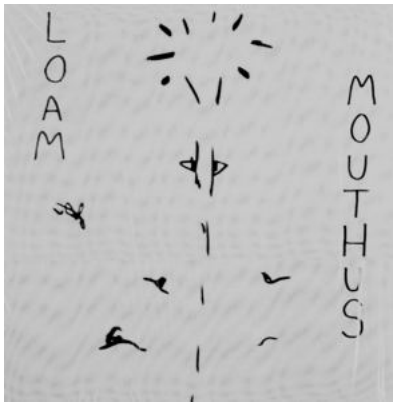
Jesus With Me

Jesus With Me
USA PSYCH-O-PATH CDPSP-010 CD (2005)

On first spin, and after not a few glasses of red wine, this sounded absolutely amazing. Today's spin finds this listener reining in the excess and enthusiasm slightly, although as guitar noise records go it's still a strong contender. What we got is a rock quartet of Russian immigrants currently living in NYC; it includes Igor Vlasov, who's one of the main men behind this label, and another founder. They've been at it since the late 1990s, and their jamming sessions led them to aspire to 'reach to the higher spirit', hence their non-secular name. Two guitars, bass and drums are their weapons of war, two cuts in 33 minutes are laid down, and much lumpen, clunky psychedelic mayhem is unleashed. On the plus side, the guitar work is extremely freaky and makes great use of the wah-wah pedal, almost weaving that distinctive sound into the very body of the guitar itself. On the minus side, the drumming is pretty hopeless, and fails to provide the necessary spine or backbone that would really give this music the necessary strength, fibre and courage it might need to take on Japanese groups like High Rise or Musica Transonic. Still, on the right night their brand of overamped guitar maltreatment can really get your juices flowing…

Of all the bunch to emerge from the US underground for this section of mag, Jesus With Me seem to be the least interested in cultivating a distinctive sound, and remain happy for the most part to settle for the default 'sludge' effect that results from the basic rock quartet set-up. So there may be a certain amount of monotony within these 33 minutes, but their free-form approach also generates great excitement. The drumming improves slightly on the second track 'And they sang a new song', and the whole group gets caught up in the massed attempt to generate surges of power, creating a 'rise and fall' effect that is like surfing on the top of a large tidal wave.

ED PINSENT 17/09/2005
www.psych-o-path.com



Mouthus

Loam
USA ECSTATIC PEACE RECORDS + TAPES E#34b LP (2004)

Great to hear more from this crazed Brooklyn duo, an essential follow-up to their eponymous debut CD on Psych-O-Path Records. Brian Sullivan wields guitar, Nate Nelson the drums, both using instruments like weapons of warfare on these five scorchers. This release may lack the full-frontal noise attack of the previous CD, and is much more to do with exploration and progress; gritty, fascinating sound textures are worked over, permissible varieties in the basic set-up are exploited to the max. You'll hear so many varied treatments of fuzz, feedback and twisted guitar string mangling that your hair will stand on end, then start weaving itself into a coconut rug. Music played by young angry geniuses who seem to be on fire with the very excitement of their discovery, setting their instruments on fire; you yourself will be destroyed in the blaze.

'Sheep Dust' on side one is a 'classic' of its type, but then so was the 1876 Brooklyn Theatre Fire. Through crazed persistence and bitter nagging, Sullivan manages to wear down his guitar strings to the nub; the recording adds layers of neurotic droning and angst-ridden feedback, resulting in a brilliant and messy action painting of guitar and drum scrummage. 'Trough' gives further examples of how complex cross-rhythms and electrifying textures can be created through very simple means, in this case by pulling the generated noises in opposite directions, perhaps with a horse and cart, and enhancing everything with excessive use of FX pedals. Let's face it, if you spend $99.00 on a flange pedal at Norm's Musical Instruments, you wanna get the most you can from your dollar.

'Must Anubis' is a demented slab of psychedelic guitar-riffing, whose depth and heaviness is offset perfectly by the madly moaning vocalese that accompanies it. No wonder the Mars EP got reissued! Comparisons have been made (not by me) likening Mouthus to a cross between Rudolph Grey and Sightings, which seems accurate enough. The long track 'Throat' closes the LP – the band are starting to seem very weird now, intensely demented and perhaps fuelled by bad drugs. Further crazed and distorted murmuring voices distinguish this cut, to say nothing of the superbly spasmodic, pulse-free, jazz-influenced drumming. Sleep-walking musicians unerringly find their way to the target in nocturnal setting, work up an unreal vibe of madness, and record it all in a lurid light.

ED PINSENT 10/09/2005
mouthus.@email.com
www.ecstaticpeace.com

Number None

Urmerica
USA REBIS 006 CD (2005)

Roaring out with their 'Fourth Annual Retort', here come this batch of US underground geniuses with a strikingly assured set of six instrumental collective workouts. I've missed the first three in this series, which include CDs called *Principles of Sitting*, and *Ways of Sleepers, Ways of Wakers*. Little is known about these mystery guys, though they may be a duo called Chris Miller and Jeremey P Bushnell from Chicago and may have some connection with a trio

called Son Of Earth-Flesh On Bone. I've said this before about Mouthus, but it's hard to believe two people can make such a racket! These are home recordings, made in Illinois, Michigan and elsewhere during 2004-2005, and incorporate materials recorded in the field during that time.

Many of the current crop of US noisesters have something to say about their home country these days – America is an endlessly fascinating subject, to be sure. Number None's bleak view of their homeland (starting with the satirical title) has clearly been influenced by terrorism, the Bush administration and other recent confidence-sapping events of the last few years; indeed this was recorded in the wake of the 2004 election. Their stance is borne out by the freaky collage on the cover – a jumble of corporate logos, images from the Revolution, skulls, bumper-sticker mottoes, Masonic symbols, targets…all strewn across the field in a sprawling visual 'belch'. Subtle!

The music itself takes a subtler approach to its critique of the status quo, and 'Suggestion for a New National Anthem' has both grandeur in the music and a tough oppositional stance implied in its title. It's as close to being a modern 'hymn' as I've heard performed in this sort of context…a slow and groaning dirge, rendered with deep electronic sighs and maybe some acoustical elements. A sad lament, this anthem certainly is informed by post 9/11 feelings and even more complex emotional states, perhaps asking questions about what national identity means. For another approach, see the Deep Listening CD by Zanana this issue. 'Secret Handshake, Hidden Hands' picks up on the Masonic references from the cover. Further grim drones, with the thoughtful addition of a swarm of locusts released into the room, and shrill tones of menace constantly inferred. Later, reverb and howling are used to take the music into a nightmarish direction. The masonic beginnings of America, as concealed within the dollar bill, are expressed in terms of an hysterical conspiracy theory coming true. Argh!

'Compression and Radiation' is of course an accurate portrait of America's heavy industries at work. Not really, but it is one of this band's more percussive pieces, wherein the distorted and massively echoed and reverbed drumming actions manage to sound both metallic and plastic. With the addition of some mad scraping and squealing noises, this mad stuff becomes the work of possessed demons, amounting to a diabolical dance of mayhem. A real standout track, if you like chaotic and free-form noise augmented by a large dose of unhinged mental-mush. If all you want is plain weirdness, skip to 'Dent Magic', which is quiet, mysterious, and very short – it features the conjoined chanting and wailing voices of the duo, clearly aiming at something a lot more sinister than just levitating the Pentagon.

'Pacific Metals 1' is, I surmise, a stock market report and/or a summary of the fluctuations in commodities trading for the last five years. Not really of course, but it involves a gentle scraping and whining sound which proves that Number None don't have to go for loud volume all the time. Perhaps the 'metals' in the title simply refers to the chosen musical instrument – you can't beat that old bowed-metal effect. This cut may be a little directionless and not as strikingly unique as rest of CD, but who could complain so far? The last track 'Monster Lobe' is pure electronic noise insanity, and as such veers more into Wolf Eyes territory than remainder of CD which could be read as a 'darker' variant of the Matt Valentine / Gang Gang Dance schools of thought. Be sure to check out the compilation *Time And Relative Dimensions In Space*, also on the REBIS label, for a further track by these primitive bozos. This one is a splendid release in anyone's book.

ED PINSENT 18/08/2005
www.imaginaryyear.com/rebis

PSI
Artificially Retarded Soul Care Operators
USA EVOLVING EAR EE12 CD (2005)

Another grando deep-dish slice of American weirdness here. As soon as CD slipped out of envelope, I was impressed by the colourful and sturdy package. It's a CD-sized card case but one which replicates an LP gatefold, complete with paper artworks pasted onto boards; the full-colour artworks are drawings by one of the band, laid out by Stephen O'Malley (no less a man). A striking combination of Cabalistic symbols, insane drug-influenced scrawls, and magically transformed human physiognomies results. The music hereon is also great, though not every minute of it is squarely in the energetic / loud zones – if you want that sort of thing, you know where to look. PSI are part of the ever-circling Brooklyn skeletal family (and as such one band that seems to have slipped through the fingers of the Psych-o-Path records label); Jaime Fennelly, Chris Forsyth and Fritz Welch recorded this in studios in Brooklyn and Austin, and live in various New England venues during 2002-2004. Not their first release; there have been two CDs before this, one with a very long title from 2002 and *Black American Flag* from 2003, not to mention the *Golden Showers* seven-inch from 2004.

Initial listening proved 'baffling', and this remains an odd record but is becoming a real 'grower' with each spin. The bafflement results from the way the band keep changing what they're doing – each track is radically different to the next. The first cut, 'Bhoiler', combines very rugged, rugose and ragged electronics with strange sounds of metal-bashing – a totally inconclusive and mysterious noise, with many elliptical gaps. This scrapey episode of humming weirdness is followed by another 'Bhoiler' – this one much quieter. It's here that PSI's mastery becomes evident, as what they do appears to have been performed and recorded in real time. There's a vivid sound quality as the expectant microphones document every motion of their inexplicable performance actions (it's impossible to say what they are doing, what they are playing). Plus, few of the sounds are processed, at least not in the way that Hair Police and Wolf Eyes end up making everything pretty glorpy; PSI just start out weird!

Obnoxious voices in 'Golden Showers' suddenly break the mood of this calm work; it's a brief snapshot capturing an unruly segment of a live show. Same recording as on the seven-inch? Don't know. It's distorted shouting, cruel feedback and audience-baiting; wish you'd been there. After this segment of 'music so ugly' (as they call it), comes 'We Broke The Sun', a real standout track which begins as a gorgeous and dreamy episode of reflective metal-scraping and mystery moves. Having set up this sci-fi landscape with mostly acoustic instruments, they add a very loud bass drum, dribbling noises, scrawled guitar doodles and some 'farty' blowing of unidentified object in a rather obscene manner. This grows into a long 15-minute workout, full of interesting dynamics, drama, unexpected developments, as they work their way towards a climax of constrained noise and energy. Recommended to fans of the first This Heat LP.

For a few seconds, there are terrifying backwards voices on 'Avi for Abcess'; then comes 'Permanent War', which could very well be a live track. Check in here if it's the noise you want! Fuzz, amplifier hum, angry guitar strums, and percussion that's being clobbered into submission. But it's not a formless jam, it's a deliberate and measured attack, and there's control in their actions. Ear-splitting feedback is used like a tactical missile. There's a tremendous 'roaring voice' effect suggesting overhead jet fighters. A strange poem/recit is belched out from between parched lips of the dissolute singer. What a goodie!

'Whiplash' restores the quiet mood with what might be a sustained organ chord, and very restrained instrumentation – a guitar is

lightly strummed and plucked as need arises, and some sparing feedback judder which occasionally threatens destruction. Again, real-time group playing, realistically documented; yet how unlike all this contemporary 'quiet, reduced improv' it is. PSI favour playing that's firm and full, very maximal, and have nothing to do this posy 'respecting the space of the other players' crap. They play like real men! The final track is short cut-ups of banter and background noise -–a bit throwaway, but still preoccupied with extremes, both in terms of subject matter and treatment of tapes…what an odd record. By all means procure a copy, if your own life isn't strange enough already!

ED PINSENT 18/08/2005
www.evolvingear.com

Terrestial Tones
Blasted
USA PSYCH-O-PATH LPSP-01 LP (2005)

A most excellent LP of primitive electronics, noise, dribble and drool…Dave Portner (from Animal Collective) and Eric Copeland (from Black Dice) did it at home in 2003 in Brooklyn. The sticker on the cover namechecks Faust and Throbbing Gristle (perhaps to help orient the casual buyer), although this record seems far more low-key than either of those innovators and (though not as inventive as Faust) very creative in quite different ways, even if it has that similar 'dark and grey' quality of doom and foreboding which haunts every other track.

Noted this before with other NYC bands who work with hand-made and broken electronica, or even those who simply use their equipment in a primitive way, but the contrast with European laptop-music and digital electronica could not be more marked. The press release makes comparisons with Christof Kurzmann, Dat Politics and anything released on the Basic Channel label. Yet their method is so much more loose and dirty, the diametric opposite of the 'clean' minimal posturing we continue to find emanating from Cologne and Vienna. Terrestial Tones offer up their creations with raw edges, pulsing like the still-beating heart of a freshly killed beast…or perhaps a monster of the woods, like Sasquatch.

Despite title of LP, their music does not 'blast' the listener, so much as encases him/her in a layer of cement and gelatin, in equal amounts. The sound is dense and inescapable, pinning your limbs to your sides as you gasp for air. In fact, the overall terrain on offer looks like a warzone after it's been 'blasted', and in this case so thoroughly desolated and ruined that the idea of rebuilding seems pretty remote. Every minute of their music, it seems, is going through a constant process of harrowing, with the desired end result of bringing it down to zero.

Side A has two long tracks and two short miniature fragments. Of the long cuts, 'Heavy Angel' is a particularly successful representation of their relentless approach, where armed with scythes and sledgehammers they winnow down your resistance…thump thump thud…probably this music is arguably better than most Black Dice records. I like what little I've heard of Black Dice, but I don't remember much about it, whereas this stark recorded statement is simple, clear and memorable. The B side has a few shorter and more abrupt experiments, mostly untitled, and filled with odd rhythmic patterns, high and sharp notes, dangerous rumbles. These shorter pieces seem inconsequential, perhaps deliberately; after the grim A-side, these episodes are like minimal pop music, with their (very) simple tunes. Like the PSI record, a real grower. Recommended.

ED PINSENT 03/09/2005
www.psych-o-path.com

The SB
The SB
USA WHITE TAPES whi. SBLP LP (2005)

A full-length LP from this NYC mystery combo, who had a split CD with Sapat on the Free 103.9 label (reviewed last ish). That split was definitely intriguing, but this one shows them really spreading their wings, comprising two superb long and contrasting pieces over two sides. The side with 'Glass' is my favourite, a piece for moog, electronics and guitar (though mostly moog) that has an intense atmosphere of palpable strangeness. Taking the essence of a Sun Ra moog solo as its spirit guide, it melds that essence with up-to-date, home-made minimalism to produce a splendid dose of formless, fascinating, twisted glorp. Where Hair Police use their vicious sound as acid thrown in the face of their enemies, the SB's music is more like some strange balm, ointment or unguent for your skin. Quite lovely.

The flip side 'Tu No Notas' is extracted from a performance event which they describe as a '9 player séance in Ohio'. One listen and you can only concur with the spiritualist / occult implications in that statement. It opens doors to the world beyond the living, and oozes thick layers of ectoplasm. The music here has the same sort of savage alien beauty as the very intimate (claustrophobic, some might say) atmosphere of the A side, but the alien life-force is now shared between a larger collective combo, of which every man and woman appears to be held in the throes of the same bizarre drug. If you like to wallow in the eerie corridors suggested by slow wails, strums, scrapes, drones and plucks, then enter the haunted house at your leisure. Pressed in clear vinyl, there are only 125 copies of this killer in existence, but I suppose when their day comes it'll be reissued and gain a higher profile.

ED PINSENT 14/09/2005
www.thesb.org
www.whitetapes8m.com
whitetapas@yahoo.com
123 Kingsland Avenue, Brooklyn, NY 11222, USA

Dean Roberts And The Black Moths
Dean Roberts And The Black Moths play The Grand Cinema
GERMANY STAUBGOLD 54 CD (2004)

Second solo LP by New Zealand player Roberts, here in reissued form. Fortunately for people like me who are very slow on the uptake, there are reissues of 'oldies' like this still coming our way, perhaps rescued in response to recent upsurge of interest in The Tower Recordings and related musicians. This was originally recorded in December 1999 and released in the USA as RITORNELL 09 in 2000; Jennifer Hor reviewed it in TSP 10th issue. Most of the musicians here are Tower Recordings refugees – Dean Roberts acting as 'leader' for these sessions, with Tim Barnes on drums, computers and processing, Matt Valentine on bass, and Charles Curtis on cello. Roberts plays guitars, keyboards, viola, computer stuff, and also treats us to his unusual vocalising style. I know that the members of Idea Fire Company have their reservations about Matt Valentine and others of his kidney, but I still like The Tower Recordings LP I've heard, and this one is very good too.

It's an intoxicating mix, a very strong combination of unusual sounds and styles of playing – acoustic instruments floating and hovering in a tasty electronic broth, the murmuring voice just one extra sound element. Most of the music has that elusive sense of 'barely cohering' and ready to fall apart any moment, which is enjoyable to hear and not so easy to create as you might think. Each element is quite delicate, and the

balance of sounds is very fragile and would be easily upset if not in the right hands. Each track is filled with detail – loops, percussion clouds, disjointed drones, faint tinkling sounds. It gives the impression of perceiving everything through strange lighting and prismatic effects, almost like taking a gentle acid-trip. It may be quiet and muffled, but there's a lot to listen to.

'The fake and detached' is probably the stand-out cut, although 'Sugar got a cocaine heart' is also great, almost like a mini-symphony in the 'trancey' mode – and not a bit like Six Organs of Admittance, for example. 'You and The Devil Blues' (referencing a song by the great Skip James) gives a good example of the half muttered, half sung vocal style that Dean is working hard to cultivate and make his own. His vocals are folded into the back of a mix that also contains a sea of delicate percussion washes and very eccentric riffs played on string instruments. You could almost call this a much weirder and electrified version of Palace Brothers, although it's virtually impossible to prise any narrative 'meaning' from any single track, and the sometimes-precious noodling of the collective combo may be the very thing that IFCO don't like. Jointly produced by Roberts and Tim Barnes; check out this German reissue as soon as you can. Also keep an eye out for his 'project' in development with European players Werner Dafeldecker and Martin Brandlmayr, as Autistic Daughters.

ED PINSENT 30/07/2005
www.staubgold.com

Smegma
Rumblings
USA HANSON HN122 CD (2005)

Great and surprising to find a 2003 recording by these LA Free Music Society co-founder heroes on the Hanson label. Wolf Eyes probably respect them greatly and are doing what they can to improve visibility of these 1970s pioneers. It's a service to people like me too, who never heard a Smegma record before. Its their first full-length release for about ten years, and what a startling revelation it be. 15 tracks of very diverse insanity. The music lurches from one 'style' to another…parpy improv squealings, crazy ranting and story-telling, live electronics. And a very loose style of playing in the classic 'rock' mode, with guitar-bass-drums set up. You hear this on at least two tracks, 'Worms' and 'Rumblings' – the latter being their Link Wray tribute! They tear into this primitive rock mode with great conviction, playing sloppy, yet giving the impression they could play tight at any moment. In fact they give the impression they could play it any way they wanted! A fine reincarnation of a million early 1960s beat combos, done with real affection too.

Then you get something like 'Johnny No!', which is just plain baffling – mystery horns blowing, radio samples, inconsequential drum patters propelling the music along an unfathomable path. Most bewildering. 'Electron' is another goodie, atonal sax wailings and some insane electronic effects, plus plenty of echoplex laid on in liberal layers. 'Moonleggs' is another surf-rock styled number, but with added detritus and voices making it even more confusing. Link Wray meets home-made electro-acoustic. On the strength of all this, no wonder Wolf Eyes like them. On the other hand, there's no getting away from their 'wacky' (and perhaps marijuana-influenced) side, something which might become slightly annoying over time. For instance on 'Bunstuffer', where they do the shaggy-dog story narration thing over a very clunky free-noise backdrop. Sun City Girls do this sort of thing too sometimes (only with much nastier stories); I don't think it really travels. But none of this mars the CD, which is fully loaded with much of the desirable question-mark factor.

As one of many LAFMS incarnations, Smegma (from California) have been doing it since the 1970s and were heavily influenced by The Mothers of Invention, Captain Beefheart, Sun Ra and The Residents. You can also compare them favourably with Revd Fred Lane and the Raudelunas thing, if you like unhinged collective free parping and honking, strumming and hitting. Few clues as to personnel on here, but amazingly Richard Meltzer (who wrote lyrics for Blue Öyster Cult) is here as a guest vocalist. Alias names for Smegma musicians include Dr ID, Amazon Bambi, Oblivia, Borneo Jimmy and Burned Mind – the latter perhaps borrowed and pressed into service as a Wolf Eyes CD title. I'll probably never get into LAFMS properly (never heard the massive box set), but this set – mostly recorded in 2003 with one from 1997 – is a good entry point and a good weird noise, both playful and serious. Crazy action-painting in sound, done with gusto by idiot-savant performance art zanies…recommended to all anti-normals everywhere.

ED PINSENT 20/08/2005
PO Box 7496, Ann Arbor, MI 48107, USA

Ones / Hands
1997-2005
USA WHITE TAPES NO NUMBER CD (2005)

Odd little CDR from this micro-operation in Brooklyn. Jeph Jerman is Hands To (among many other things), currently resident in Arizona and, with his legacy of quiet nature-based music-making, continuing to explore the sonic qualities of the mysteries provided on this earth by God's bounty. Daniel Mitha and Nick Phillips are Ones. Put their respective sounds together and you get this – lovely drifting music, equal parts field recordings and improvised playing, but for once a combination of the two that doesn't send you straight to sleep with its obviousness. Starting with guitars and basses being plucked and strummed in lazy fashion, melded with footsteps of people walking around. Later, chimes, melodies, pipes and recorders. Distant field recordings, open-air countryside, a barking dog. A drifty-creaky dream of paradise found in the morning sunlight.

Getting a good result with this subtle and half-formed approach is not so easy as you might expect; the guys in question arrived at it by simply sending records and tapes to each other in the mail. Exchange of ideas and gradual accumulation of content, you see. It may have been assembled from lots of small fragments, but it does make a very pleasing whole. Very gentle stuff, which is more than you can say for most of the music arriving from the US underground these days. May appeal to fans of Popol Vuh; lies midway between the work of Loren Chasse and Taku Sugimoto (at a time when he still played his guitar). It's packaged on a wooden floor tile, it's a single half-hour piece on a CDR, and only 37 copies in the entire edition!

ED PINSENT 04/09/2005
whitetapas@yahoo.com
123 Kingsland Avenue, Brooklyn, NY 11222, USA

Tarentel
We Move Through Weather
USA TEMPORARY RESIDENCE LIMITED TRR67 CD (2004)

A very impressive recording that combines strong rhythms, guitar melodies and riffs and other post-rock elements with improvisation and soundscape music from the San Francisco group Tarentel. We move through weather? - yes, we do and, as Tarentel prove, we never escape it and, depending on your mood when you listen to this album, it (weather / album) serves as a metaphor for all kinds of 'things' ranging from nostalgia and a search for security among others, and the whole paraphernalia of concepts and ideas that hang from them.

The album is obviously intended to be heard as a single opus that happens to have 8

named movements. The opener 'Hello! We Move Through Weather' throws you into the vortex straight away: repetitive tom-tom rhythms propel you through flurries of organ and guitar squeals into calm blue skies of resonant guitar riffs, serene violins and birdsong. Needless to say, it's not going to be smooth sailing: on 'Elephant Shoes', it appears the flight crew on Air Tarentel are having problems adjusting to manual operations as the gear-sticks and knobs creak for want of oiling and maintenance, and the plane keeps changing altitude. (Ah, the joys of cheap and nasty airlines cutting corners by outsourcing engineering works!) 'Get Away From Me You Clouds Of Doom' structurally reprises the title track but we now journey through darker atmospheres over territories that may not welcome us foreign tourists and our course is now uncertain and likely to alter. Guitars generate tension with wobbles and reverbs and as the clouds thicken, the percussion engines become muffled; around the 6th minute, all automatic navigation fails and we must now fight our way out of the miasma. On 'Klankity-Klank', the clouds part briefly and we see below us a delightful little island of digital bliss and buzz.

Alas the clouds close up and we must trudge through 'Bump Past, Cut Up Through Windows' whose precarious piano chords and tribal drumming suggesting nostalgia and the relentless pace of time respectively fight for dominance only to reach an inconclusive climax. A soundscape of bits of found sounds, yawning violins and guitar chords searching for a riff, all hanging loosely together, scrapes by. 'A Cloud No Bigger Than A Man's Hand' puts on what hopefully is the last leg of the journey: while the rhythm section powers away and the jangling bluesy guitars try to rally spirits, for a time it seems we're back on track and we'll be rid of the darkness and uncertainty. We wish. Guitar melodies collapse into clouds of noise, violins creak and when the plane lands and we disembark at our destination, we find ourselves lost in a world from which there's no escape and must console ourselves with memories of potentials glimpsed and lost during our trip, and mull over what might have been: 'We're The Only Ghosts Here' - a fitting and sad epitaph.

The best tracks on the album turn out to be the short sound collages where Tarentel are at their most experimental and improvisatory: the sections of the journey where we got stuck and failed to appreciate our surroundings because we were too obsessed with moving on. The balance between the structured rock-oriented aspects of the music and the chaos that constantly threatens to overturn forms the pivot around which the band creates tension and explores sonic dynamics to good effect. The track titles (not all of them good and some rather throwaway) suggest many different interpretations for the musical journey, including the most obvious if most banal: life itself.

JENNIFER HOR 03/05/2005
www.temporaryresidence.com

Alec K. Redfearn and The Eyesores

The Quiet Room
USA CUNEIFORM RECORDS
RUNE 204 CD (2005)

If there had of been a kitchen sink handy to throw into the production of this album I'm sure it would have been, so dense with influences is this quintessentially American CD. If it is at all possible to imagine the combination of the American classical tradition (Ives, Cage, Reich), Gypsy folk, Weimer cabaret, Americana (Partch, Beefheart, Tom Waits), field recording, and indie rock from The Velvet Underground on, it might bear some resemblance to the sound of Alec K Redfearn and The Eyesores fourth outing. To say that the man is eclectic in his tastes may just be somewhat of an understatement.

This multitudinous amount of raw material can be a little overwhelming at times, many of the pieces change track tangentially before they are though, and at the quick pace that is set the sheer sense of profligacy that infuses this album occasionally leads one to wonder if Redfearn isn't just a little too smart for his own good. Of the CD's fifteen tracks a good five are about a minute or less in duration, and it could have perhaps been a little more coherent as a whole without them. These are small quibbles of course. The albums breadth of scope is quite astonishing, and as such is beyond all but the strongest minds.

Possibly Redfearn's greatest achievement is that he manages to put all of these influences and more in his own retro-blender of sound and come out with something rather unique. What is perhaps most surprising of all is that I haven't heard more of the man and his band of merry players. Truly, the only comparable figure that immediately springs to mind able to produce a similar uniqueness from such diversity might be John Zorn. One imagines that his time will come of course, but until the rest of us catch up these bold voyagers of post-modern sonic reconstruction may well have a lonely road ahead.

AARON ROBERTSON
P.O. Box 8427, Silver Spring, MD 20907-8427, USA
Cuniform2@aol.com
www.cuniformrecords.com

★★★★★★★★★★★

Russ Waterhouse (The SB / White Tapes) mini-interview

"I've been sporadically involved with Free103.9 for years now. The SB has played a few of their events (including last year's Tune In at The Kitchen), and I curated a number of 'noise' shows at their space in Brooklyn.

3 members of The SB started playing together in late 1997, but its membership quickly doubled (and later tripled). Most initially knew each other through working in animation. I joined in early 1998, after a similar trio I had been playing in fell apart. I've been friends with one member since high-school. We meet once a week, and improvise for 2-3 hours. Currently there is a pool of 6 regular players, and one that stops by infrequently.

3 members have come and gone, and there have also been guest players...including Aaron Rosenblum of Son Of Earth. I've noticed that as members have gotten married / had children / moved further out of Manhattan, the frequency with which they show up at our weekly sessions has declined. Everybody understands / respects this...we are probably as much a social club as we are a band.

The current line-up is basically Mark Bajuk – synth, Adam Burr – electronics, Tony Fasce - synth, percussion, other, Silvia Feriozzi - vocals, reed instruments, other, Eric Maurer - guitar, synth, Brent Peich - bass, effects, Russ Waterhouse - synth, tapes, other.

Mark also plays in the ambient / post-rock duo One Mile North. Tony and Eric both play in the more jazz-oriented trio MFM. I play in a 'new age' duo (Watersports), and have guested in other groups, including Laundry Room Squelchers and Six Organs Of Admittance.

People have asked if The SB is a collective, but that word does not feel wholly accurate. We are a band. Not every member shows up every week, but everybody contributes whatever else they are inclined to. Eric records everything, maintains our archives, organizes rehearsals and recordings sessions, and has been responsible for all logistics related to live performances. Tony is our webmaster, and has put out a few The SB releases on his label Kiln. I put together most The SB releases (with Eric's help), and booked most of our shows and tours. Everybody contributes something more than sound, however...

A recent review of The SB LP in *Vital Weekly* lumped us in with Wolf Eyes and No Neck Blues Band. Although a few of us are familiar with those bands, what The SB does (and how it operates) is barely related. If I can point to any influences (at least in terms of how I choose material for our releases), they would be synth players in the home-taping scene (particularly Paul Kelday), and hard-to-classify / somewhat amorphous improv (for instance, Anima). The SB LP reflects these 2 facets of the group sound we've refined over years. The recording of The SB's first session sounds very similar to how we sound now. How we sound on any given night has mostly to do with how many / which players are present, and how we are arranged in / the acoustics of the performance space. (of course...)"

BLOCKS OF CONSCIOUSNESS AND THE UNBROKEN CONTINUUM

BOOK + DVD Editors: Brian Marley and Mark Wastell Published by Sound 323

Tetuzi Akiyama
Ruth Barberán
Burkhard Beins
Clive Bell
Johan Berthling
John Butcher
John Cage
Xavier Charles
Richard Chartier
Bob Cobbing
Lol Coxhill
Angharad Davies
Rhodri Davies
Matt Davis
Bertrand Denzler
Phil Durrant
Isabelle Duthoit
Margarida Garcia
Jean-Luc Guionnet
Bernhard Günter
Graham Halliwell
Andy Hamilton
Greg Kelley
Annette Krebs
Anton Lukoszevieze
Sachiko M
Brian Marley
Mattin
Sean Meehan
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The Necks
Andrea Neumann
Takehiro Nishide
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David Toop
Taku Unami
Nikos Veliotis
John Wall
Dan Warburton
Mark Wastell
Otomo Yoshihide

Book Artwork & Design by Damien Beaton

What is the most significant development that has occurred in adventurous music during the last decade? It's arguably neither a technique-driven development nor a technological one. Rather, it's how we, musicians and audience alike, have opened our ears to the world and embraced its sounds as both a musical resource and as music itself.

Blocks of Consciousness and The Unbroken Continuum explores the work and aesthetic of various cutting edge musicians, environmental / sound artists and noise-makers. As well as profiles of Richard Chartier, The Necks, John Wall and Sachiko M, the book contains explorations of the history and changing nature of free improvisation, of Cage's iconoclastic 4'33", and of where to draw the line (somewhat tentatively, to be sure) between improvisation and composition. There is, in addition, a series of personal statements by almost two dozen musicians, composers and sound artists, collected by Rhodri Davies; and in Out in the Field Bertrand Denzler and Jean-Luc Guionnet interview improvisers about their music and group the anonymised answers thematically. The authors of the principal chapters – David Toop, Clive Bell, Brian Marley, Dan Warburton, Andy Hamilton and Will Montgomery – are well-known and respected writers on music/sound.

Machines, noise and improvisation are factors common to all of the chapters in the book. David Reid's DVD selection of video performances also carries this theme. The performances, all filmed during the last five years and part of his growing archive, represent a diverse range of musicians and their musics. Note, however, that the DVD content is neither illustrative of nor subordinate to the written material in the book; it comprises a chapter in its own right.

A feature of Blocks of Consciousness and The Unbroken Continuum that will be much remarked upon is Damien Beaton's lavish design, which makes the book so much more than a mere receptacle for words.

Hardback

345 printed pages - full colour

Publishing date - 1st Jan. 2006

Price - £50

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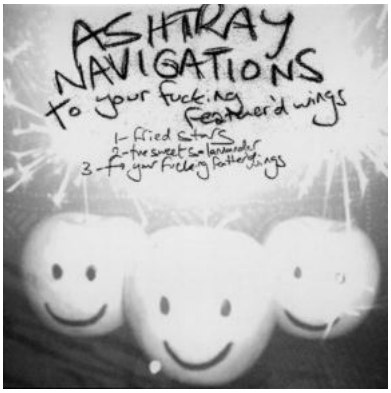
Music from the UK underground



Ashtray Navigations
To Your Fucking Feather'd Wings
NORWAY / GREECE
GOLDSOUNDZ GS#21 / ABSURD #42 CD (2004)

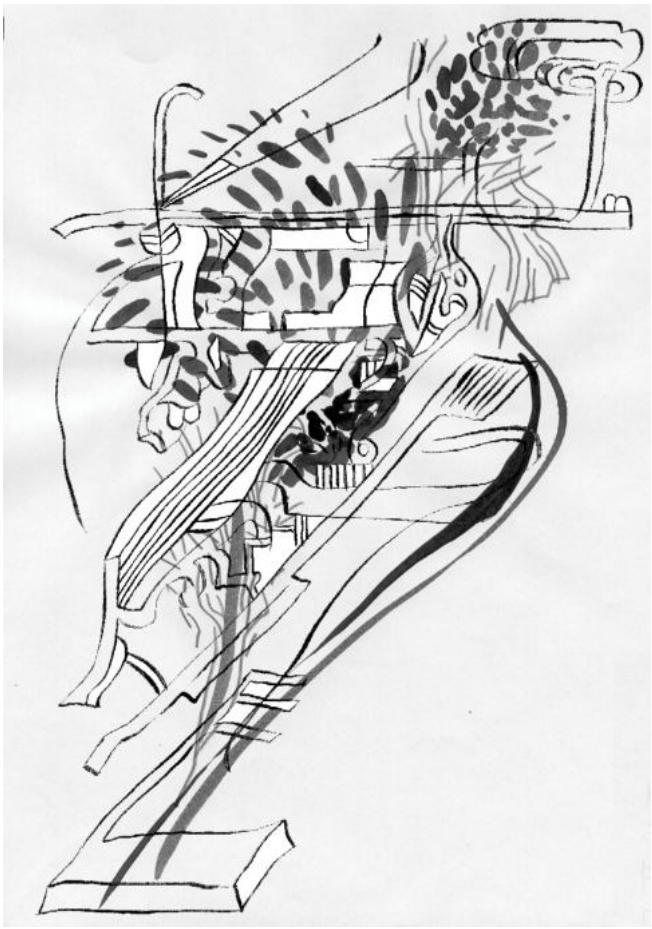
Another strong release from the UK's very own underground home-made music instrumentalist. There are few people working in this area – come to think of, very few musicians – who can so instantly transport the listener directly into their personal universe the way Phil Todd does. He does it every time, and very convincingly. Even a short piece like 'Fried Stars' manages it, with its limpid floating qualities of quietly shimmering beauty. 'The Sweet Salamander' is slightly longer, with its gentle music-box figure suggesting a five-minute dream of a shuffling mechanical man wandering through Toyland in ungainly fashion. The music is filled with exquisite detail, tenderness even. A surreal scenario fit for sunlit dreams. Among the gorgeous droning and home-made Kosmische noodling, there's a harpsichord (Casio) sound that's reminiscent of the best Nico records. Maybe Todd should record a cover version of *The Marble Index* LP, in entirety…

The title track is the long one. Dispelling the early-morning dreamlike mood of the preceding cuts, this one slides in with faintly darker tones, a troubled background provided by an insistent wah-wah guitar, a white noise hum gathering in intensity…in the way he makes every musical second count, Todd is worth a thousand of those precious 'minimal' improvisers. He produces a rich tapestry of engaging and fascinating sounds for the ears at all times, keeping the continuous flow going with a generous hand, and putting on additional layers as needed. As if needed, this CD is evidence that he can execute the tiny miniature as well as the grand epic canvas with equal facility (this remark was copped from another writer's observation about Jimmy Page and the *Physical Graffiti* double LP, but it's true!).

In his interview this ish, Todd confirms his abiding interest in the work of avant-garde film makers, and (which I didn't know before), his intention to emulate some of their methods in sound. On the long track here, he does indeed suggest the effects of double-exposed film, with the superimposition of at least two different narrative strands – one of a tiny chick struggling out of its eggshell and unfolding its wings, another of a soaring eagle in flight. The music of course also changes and grows more cosmic, with all the protean ease of a Brakhage five-reeler…the lengthy clouds of uncertain mixed droning grow in size as they stretch across the evening sky. The guitar begins to freak out in a very psychedelic, multi-coloured way. Reverb and other treatments are spooned onto the sound like so much treacle. Solemn percussion marches in. Alchemical transformations, changing colours…it's endlessly fascinating. A great CD of modern psychedelic genius.

ED PINSENT 18/08/2005
goldsoundz2003@hotmail.com
www.ante.gr/absurd

Ashtray Navigations
To Get Beyond Nihilism By Revaluing



Combat
UK HYPNAGOGIA ago01 3" CD (2005)

Also out, this three-inch 'gem' with a little chesspiece knight on the cover. The main title is elaborate enough, but the joke is that there are three short tracks (some of which last mere seconds) with even longer and more elaborate titles. Plus one long track which lasts about 20 minutes. Phil Todd with Hilary Insall and Alexander Neilson recorded it in Leeds in February 2005. Somehow I prefer the three micro fragments. In only a few seconds, they hint at vast and unknowable sound worlds, filled with richness waiting to be explored, while the long track is just another (admittedly very top quality) bit of droning and noodling melody. Among all the clattering percussion, there seems to the addition of a violin, playing in vaguely raga-like style. Another solid piece of transcendent monotony…

ED PINSENT 18/09/2005
www.hypnagogia.co.uk

Phil Todd is interviewed this issue.

Hototogisu
Green
USA HEAVY BLOSSOM NO NUMBER CD (2005)

If individual CDs could be likened to rides at the amusement park, this

full-length album by duo Hototogisu would be approximated by some weird and wonderful fusion of the old ghost train ride, the tunnel ride where the surrounding tunnel rotates so passengers think they're travelling upside down and rides that swing you up 180 degrees one way then come down and swing you 180 degrees the other way. Maybe we can throw in those novelty cinema rides where your seat rocks you to one side then the other, then floats as if on a river and then tips you over an imaginary waterfall as you watch the Indiana Jones-style adventure on the screen above. I may be exaggerating a little here but certainly the first few times I heard this recording I was feeling quite disoriented about halfway through. (I have since got used to the CD so now it's just like listening to some really heavy weather with gale force winds blowing overhead.) A wonderful experience of free noise, drone, glitchy electronics, abstract machine rhythms (and one occasionally hears some heavy rock / black metal rhythms and even Tibetan Buddhist devotional music as well - plus I'm still trying to find the passages where there is singing), guitar spitfire battles and constant throbbing is to be had here. Funnily, the soundtrack - for it certainly does sound like a soundtrack to a strange science fiction / fantasy film - is not overwhelming or suffocating; the pace throughout the recording is actually quite steady, no sections are faster or slower than others and, come to think of it, none is louder or less noisy than the others. Some parts of the CD are even quite repetitive and monotonous now that I have heard it a few times. Perhaps Hototogisu just missed out on creating a true mind-melting masterpiece of free noise / drone by not delving more into the dynamics of the elements of the soundtrack (and turning the album into a loop-the-loop roller-coaster ride) but for some people I guess the work as it is is extreme enough, how could Hototogisu top this any more and I'm just being a nit-picker for the sake of it.

The pedigrees of the two musicians involved in creating this headcleaner are impressive: Marcia Bassett who looks after the 'oooowwwhh' parts is a member of that dark droney band Double Leopards and Matthew Bower, handling the 'rrrggghh' parts is a member of Skullflower and has done work with Vibracathedral Orchestra; guest musician Mick Flower is a member of Vibracathedral Orchestra. If you're familiar with these acts and think you can handle Hototogisu's *Green* as a much noisier version of what they do and indeed what Hototogisu have done in the past on CD-Rs (I have not heard any of the duo's previous music but from what I have read about it, it was much more peaceful and soothing), you're welcome to check out *Green* but be prepared: a sick bag or a spare nappy might the least you need for the trip MB and MB will take you on.

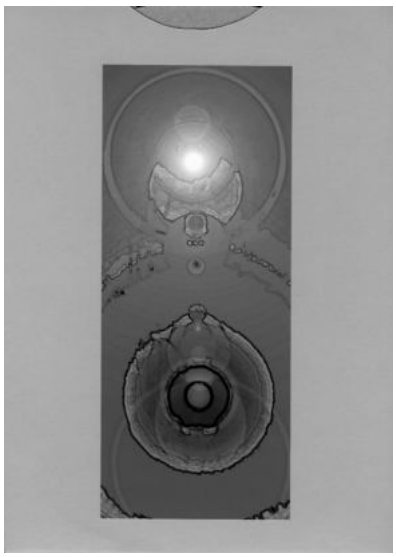
The artwork on the CD sleeve is very intense (some of it appears to have been photographed close up) and brims with hidden violence: a very appropriate visual package to the hellride within.

JENNIFER HOR 12/07/2005
www.eclipserecords.com

(Ed Hardy of Eclipse Records pressed 1,000 copies of the album for the band)

Jazzfinger

This Small Space Where The Salt Glitters
UK CLASSIC ENGLISH WOMB CEW001 LP (ND)



Jazzfinger are Hasan Gaylani and Ben Jones, who performed at The Sage festival this year and left quite an impression on me. This probably isn't their debut release, but it is the first on their own label, and a lathe-cut in clear vinyl. They do extremely atmospheric creaky music, creating an imaginary world you could get lost inside. Scrapes, drones, hums and indistinct ghostly voices are pasted together in home-made, slow-moving dark ambient scapes. The four tracks are called 'Frozen Office 1', 'Frozen Office 2', 'The Roof of Susan's Sky' and 'Slate'; in these titles, and in the sonic outpourings, you can tell Jazzfinger are mostly indoor guys, and very much inspired by the dreariness to be found in the average UK urban environment. Unlike some of the New Zealand droners this ish, who draw their inspiration from beautiful weather, the sky and the sea, Jazzfinger's creative spirit is fed by vistas comprising rainy days, grey skies, dismal housing estates, urban blight, and too much television. Not to say that's their lifestyle, they just play what they see. Very good grey-matter abstractions. LP has an elegant piece of black and white artwork depicting an Op-Art cityscape with a palm tree. How mysterious. I like this record a lot!

ED PINSENT 06/09/2005

Jazzfinger

The Well of Used Dreams
UK CLASSIC ENGLISH WOMB CEW 002 CD (2005)

This recent full-length CD of theirs is a total triumph. Ben Jones and Hasan Gaylani are joined by Ben Wilkinson on four out of the 11 tracks, Sarah Sullivan on one. Compared with what I've heard on the lathe-cut records, there may be more concern with 'music-making' of a sort, as opposed to working with pure sound. The opener 'Wooden Fireworks' is almost Ashtray Navigations; a wobbly organ drone and bursts of home-made percussion underpin the general debris of noise that's strewed on top. 'On Red Moon' is another quiet drone with found-object percussion, including a typewriter. 'Secret Grandfather' has a stringed instrument with is probably an electric guitar with echo, but it sounds like an exotic outer-space harp! All the work continues to exhibit their hallmark, which is a very focused exploration of time and space, creating that 'infinity' sensation. Compared with the lathe-cut which was mostly outdoors and gloomy, this is indoors music, and filled with much solace and compassion.

'History of Tweed' is a clunky workout which hobbles along before eventually coalescing; it features a good confrontation between some mild 'noise' elements and a two-note figure played on the organ. Also good are 'Crying Video', with piano wafting in from a neighbouring room; 'Summer is Wet', for its very alienated atmosphere; and 'The Lighthouse Keepers', which has something of an epic sweep in its duration. Mysteriously, many of the tracks are cut off very abruptly, usually when you're just beginning to succumb to their spell. This creates the impression that some of them just went on and on forever, and we're just hearing one-tenth of what Jazzfinger are capable of.

The sumptuous sleeve package is by Ben Jones. It's an elaborate card wallet about the size of a cropped A4 magazine, with an arch-shaped insert. Four full-colour photo-print glossy artworks are pasted on, creating a thing of psychedelic beauty which you'll want to hang on the wall. Collect this item and you'll be glad you got in on the ground floor with this band.

ED PINSENT 20/09/2005
outerfinger@hotmail.com

Storm Bugs

Up The Middle Down The Sides
USA FUSETRON FUSE036 LP (2004)

Assembled by our good friend Chris Freeman for his Fusetron label, this

is a compilation of the work of this UK cassette band, featuring some of their 'vintage sonic musings' from 1978-1981. This issue follows in a chain of releases and reissues that have been emerging from the time when Philip Sanderson and Steven Ball's work was being 'rediscovered' in 2000; from that date onwards, various releases from the Snatch Tapes archive have followed, including the *Reprint* CD on Anomalous, originally released as a cassette purporting to have been performed by two girls. This comp works overtime to convince you of the sheer depth and breadth of the variety in Storm Bugs output; it veers from poppy electronic tunes with drum machine beats, to insane long drones and distorted voice-based pieces. The LP is short but intense; every moment counts, packed with imagination, ideas and innovation.

Many good qualities shine forth, and it's not simply nostalgia for the home-made tape scene; these guys had serious talent. There's a lot of invention in evidence, including spontaneous creations made out of rewired radio sets, old vinyl records, and the wreckage of smashed and deconstructed guitars. Plus the trusty VCS3 and WASP synths are forced to work double-time. Never once did the pair fall into the trap of making unrestrained 'table' noise with loads of effects pedals, nor follow the post-Throbbing Gristle 'industrial' route towards that dead-end of ghastly noise trotted out in support of sick imagery. Storm Bugs music was extremely thoughtful, well-considered. There's one tape-loop piece near the end of side A that is simply glorious (can't tell you what it's called, as track titles are only printed on front cover in an unreadable spiral layout) – it's a messy splurge of semi-controlled noise, a maelstrom spinning layers of aural detritus around in a hypnotic mandala of discarded trash. Listen, and a mild form of delirium will take hold of you. This piece alone, in its unassuming way, touches on greatness; I've heard few things quite like it.

Besides the enthusiasm that accompanies their genuine sense of excitement as they make each new discovery, these young chaps also exhibit a remarkable assurance; there's no mad rush to try out everything they can do, nor a frenetic race to prove they're much more far-out than anyone else. Instead, there's a measured sense of working it through, proceeding with each new experiment in a thorough way, learning from it. A lot of home-made DIY music (both then and now) lacks this discipline; many hopeful performers try and make up for that lack through expending lots of kinetic, but pointless, energy. With Storm Bugs, nothing went to waste; they kept their batteries charged up, and used their power wisely.

A fine document from a time when 'lo-fi' was a genuinely challenging aesthetic for artists to work with, unlike today when it's merely one more lifestyle option for bored rock stars. David Jackman, a fellow Snatch Tapes artiste, guests on one track. Absolutely splendid release.

ED PINSENT 19/09/2005
www.fusetronsound.com

The Shadow Ring

I'm Some Songs
USA SWILL RADIO 23 LP (2005)

Their final LP, already a little 'old' – the music was recorded in 2001-2002, mixed in 2003, released 2005. Graham Lambkin, Darren Harris and Tim Goss make their curtain call as a band with this release. The music of The Shadow Ring, already extremely wiry and minimal, has here been reduced and pared-down even further, to create an incredibly stark statement – almost to the point of brutality. The techniques used are transparently simple; live electronics, very basic tapework. The most sophisticated playing comes from Goss on his synth; in the past, Darren used to play some instrumentation, but here his only contribution is his voice. But the voice has been further manipulated, by use of the most extreme varispeed technique imaginable, slowing his voice down so that, for the most part, it creates an inhuman and nightmarish groaning.

The LP opens with a bleak and chilling instrumental drone. After that, 'Man on the Land' paints a picture of a hideous industrial landscape, in which a lone figure appears, followed by further shadowy figures. It's a fairly ghastly vision, an update on the walk on the beach taken by the narrator on the previous LP *Lindus*; where the beach walk was certainly a very paranoid episode, here the mental illness has turned into pure psychosis, as the narrator regards the activities of people around him with the deepest suspicion. Darren's ultra-slow voice narrates the grim tale; you can follow the printed lyric sheet for further information as you endure this hideous dream.

'Man' is an abstract droning noise with added water recordings; water being a prominent feature via sound and image discernible through much of The Shadow Ring's opera, including for example the overlooked *Poem* LP, a tape assemblage by Lambkin. The narrating voice is, briefly, intelligible, but is soon slowed down again to regain its ogre-like globby intoning qualities. 'Start Repeating' is so far the most approachable track on the LP; synth sounds and electronics, almost forming a tune of sorts. But the production, if you can call it that, is so under-developed it's non existent; Ralf and Florian would have heart failure! I'm Some Songs…zero songs so far. Side one ends with more horrid voices emanating from the very bottom of a sewer.

'Drainage' opens side two, combining many of the elements we've heard so far; a long, depressing synth drone to create a real downer vibe. Gritty field recordings, roughly plucked from the air and equally roughly pressed into service as ill-fitting cassette tapes. Water sounds, and squeaky doors closing. Further slow voices, this time emanating from Goss, almost Satanic with their aura of doom. Yet it's so understated, like the whole LP; it's filled with a quiet power, and a stern conviction at the core that is impossible to ignore. It's hard to nail this down, but what comes over is this unbearable sense of 'realness'. Anything other music you listen to after this seems somehow contrived, artificial, evasive, filled with half-truths. I think it's fair to say the band have finally achieved their ideal, a near-absolute statement of painful honesty.

'& In' is a thick fog of abstract morphing rhythms; I'm convinced now the whole LP is happening in slow motion, not just the treated voice. Am I playing this at the right speed? Incredibly eerie and atmospheric; this could almost be an out-take from a Tart LP, only played by an Eastern European bar-band who learned it phonetically off a scratchy old record. The voice continues to murmur, striving to communicate despite mouth being full of glue.

We reach the final track, the title piece; what will The Shadow Ring do for their final recorded statement? For ten seconds, everyone wakes up; there is this brief snippet of lively furniture-based noise, as of stirring from a dream; but there's no respite and we're immediately plunged back in the slow whirlpool of electronic sludge. In the background, a vague domestic sound-scape is played out; kitchen percussion, doors, windows and tables. In a downbeat final statement, Lambkin (speaking through the voice of Harris) seems optimistic of the chances for future success, as he tells us 'I am building my strength up…taking my legacy one step further…going straight to the top'. But look at the images of the trio on the insert; already they're fading away, grainy images, memories. The Shadow Ring have put their own music in its coffin (or *it's* coffin, as Graham would have it).

ED PINSENT 24/09/2005

The Shadow Ring are interviewed this issue.

Music from FRANCE

Pascal Comelade
Back to Schizo (1975-1983)
FRANCE MUSEA / GAZUL RECORDS GA 8679.AR CD (2004)

Now here's a nice discovery of some charming music I never heard before; records like this make doing Sound Projector really worthwhile. It's a compilation CD of the work of French 'veteran' experimenter Comelade, who made a bunch of recordings and mostly issued them himself during 1975 to 1983. No stuffy academic he, Comelade thrived in the bustling world of home-made cassettes – he released ten of them himself – and LPs issued on tiny indie labels such as Pole Records, Parasite, DYS and ATEM. What's more, during 1982-1984 he played concerts on the same bill as such coolsters and major players as This Heat, Jac Berrocal, Lol Coxhill, Pere Ubu, Tuxedomoon, and The Raincoats. Among his avowed influences – Eno, Robert Wyatt, Carla Bley and Michael Nyman. His collaborators on the records included Richard Pinhas of Heldon, who played guitar on the first LP Fluence; Gavin Bryars; and David Cunningham, from Piano Records.

Comelade's primary tool was the tape recorder. Specifically, a Revox A77 without which he could not function musically – most of his work involves simple, elegant, beautiful tape-work construction. But he also played the organ, the electric piano, the Synthi EMS (drool!) and toyshop instruments, extracting a surprisingly robust sound from the latter. Mostly what he plays is a more approachable and idiosyncratic form of US Minimalism – think of Terry Riley, La Monte Young, Steve Reich – but in a lively and home-made way, and with no theory or dogma attached. Interestingly, he also opted for much shorter duration than those guys did; some Comelade works last barely a minute, but are packed with musical information.

The CD before us has extracts from his LPs, EPs and two of his cassettes – that word quaintly rendered in the booklet as a French phonetic spelling, 'K7' (think about it). There are ten tracks from the LP Paralelo, dating from 1979-1980; some great Synthi sounds, and an intelligent precision to the arrangements that almost rivals Kraftwerk for their 'obvious' simplicity. Clever rhythms too; if nothing else, this release will intrigue any listeners still searching for early antecedents of modern Techno. The short length of each cut is a boon; nothing outstays its welcome. Two cuts with Comelade at the piano and Pascal Vergnaud on the sax are haunting; elsewhere, Gavin Bryars briefly adds a guest vocal, made into a tape sample. On the tracks from the 1978 EP Sequences Paiennes, toy pianos are used and overdubbed to achieve a sort of solo Gamelan effect.

By 1981, the economy of means and invention are even more impressively evident on the four examples from the EP Ready-Made; these are miniature devices of genius, using mostly acoustic instrumentation – piano, percussion, toy instruments, and tape work. #3 in this series – a gorgeous piece - may be in the Music For Airports mode; small fragments of taped music, used to build something larger. The three cuts from 1982's Sentimentos show the same method, evolving still further and more eccentrically. Now we're moving away from the Terry Riley comparisons and into something clunkier, where the joins are more visible. The resulting robust little piano and percussion pieces are so crunchy you could eat them up like crispbread snacks.

The CD closes with 2 performances from cassettes he released in 1983. This is a great selection (put together by the composer himself); now I want to hear all his work! Let's hope this is the start of a Comelade reissue programme; in the meantime I'd recommend this to anyone who digs the music of all and any of the names listed above.

ED PINSENT 06/09/2005
www.musearecords.com

Etron Fou Leloublan
Les Sillons de la Terre
FRANCE MUSEA / GAZUL RECORDS GA 8662.AR CD (2004)

A reissue of a 1983 LP from these frenetic and humourous Rock-In-Opposition heroes of France. In fact, it's their penultimate LP – not sure if this is part of a considered reissue programme of their catalogue or what, but it's most welcome. Etron (whose name is some kind of contraction of a phrase involving a mad white wolf) were one of the more active bands in this short-lived but well meaning 'RIO movement'. After a couple years of international touring, they'd picked up the saxophone player Bruno Meillier, and consequently started heading in a vaguely 'jazz' direction for the rest of their short life. Evidence of said jazz preoccupation is here on these grooves, but take heart if you were expecting Loose Tubes or something equally ghastly. Instead, it's mostly atonal sax-squealing which is noisy and free and adds greatly to the fast-moving idiosyncratic pace of this rather breathless set.

Etron remained fundamentally a bass-drums-organ trio with songs, performing tricky prog-influenced time signatures, and displayed fluency in the musical modes that require your fingers to move fast. Guigou Chevenier was the drummer, who also wrote the (completely bonkers) lyrics for their songs, and later persuaded Charles Hayward to briefly join his drum trio Les Batteries and play the Festival Circuit in Europe. By this point the band were sounding like a sharper and shorter version of Magma; the whole record indeed comes from another 'golden age' when musicians still had old-fashioned ambitions, such as learning how to play instruments, rather than simply manipulate soundfiles in a laptop; and playing live music as a group to audiences, as a priority over making and releasing lots of recorded product. I'm not sure how 'oppositional' they were – RIO bands tended to deliver some form of protest music or left-wing content in their lyrics – but this is still great music whichever way you cut it. Dense, well-constructed, well-played…it shows up a lot of recent music as pretty thin.

According to Chris Cutler, who listed and sold their records in his ReR Catalogue at the time, by the time of Fac Aux Elements Dechaines [maybe their last LP?], the band had become 'less fast and furious and more musically diffuse than before'. A fellow drummer himself, he loved Chevenier's drumming and even discerned a John French influence there. Can't dispute any of what Cutler says. There's also a real quirkiness in the lyrics, which have no left-wing sensibilities but rather a whiff of Surrealism and sometimes, as in 'Le Lavabo', a scatological touch which only the French can do with such panache. 'Le Lavabo' also has a peculiar quirky musical arrangement which allies perfectly with its strange lyric. No less perverse is the lyric of 'Émoi', wherein the fictitious narrator writes off everyone in the human race as 'cons, sales, bêtes venales…', everyone except himself of course. He is a true martyr, so kind, gracious and polite…Albert Camus himself couldn't have done better in exposing the self-regarding hypocrisies of the bourgeoisie so neatly. 'Iconoclastic and provocative' is how the press release sums up their lyric-writing approach. Great record, useful reissue of a 1980s classic from a time when Fred Frith was king…

ED PINSENT 20/08/2005
www.musearecords.com

Various Artists
Ignoble Vermine: A Tribute to Ptôse
FRANCE MUSEA / GAZUL RECORDS GA 8678 CD (2004)

Over the course of 19 tracks and 70 minutes, various European avant-electro popsters and misfits pay their homage to Ptôse. Now Ptôse are a new name to me, but seems they were a cult French combo and early electronics band who released records from 1980 to 1986, and occupied an underground-ish niche in Europe where they were considered to be on a par with The Residents. Not only am I ignorant about Ptôse, I'm also unfamiliar with the work of most of the names on this comp, but it's a goodie – packed with jolly and weird 'disco' type fun with a slightly dark edge, skewed electro-beat stuff. The compilers assure us that Ptôse's weirdness derives from the fact that they came from the West of France. (?) At any rate, all the cover bands feel the same affection for these lost heroes.

Ptôse released the LPs Ignobles Limaces, The Swoop and Face De Crabe – all of which are probably scarce as heck on vinyl. Phillippe Perreaudin had the idea for this comp and did all the work of putting it together. It's bound to appeal to any fans of this period and this 'style' – if such it be – of music, or at least it might do if it were more disciplined. Some of the bands here have a lot more equipment and effects than you could get in the 1980s, and don't they just know it! Some cuts, particularly the one by Pernice and Bolino, are guilty of this excess, but then it ain't a crime to update.

Most of the music works just fine though and there are numerous outstanding renditions of these well-loved ditties. Les Hauts De Plafond have an irresistible electropop beat as they cover 'Ecrasons La Vermine dit the Bogeyman', thus setting the theme for the LP title and artworks, ie wacky photographs of bugs and mites seen through the microscope, with added comic-strip speech bubbles poking from their heads. Servovalve do the squelchy analogue thing quite well, remaining truer to the spirit of the 1980s; ditto Lefdup and Lefdup, whose sax sound almost recalls The Cravats. Hate their mannered singing style though, and that's a drawback on a comp with lotsa lyrics. Deleted recall The Residents with their layers of out-of-tune synths, straight out of the Duck Stab period. Pierre Bastien makes a welcome return (haven't heard his stuff for a while) with his home-made robots and machines; his track sounds delightfully 'rustic', music played by semi-automotons on acoustic instruments.

Palo Alto features the compiler Perreaudin, his regular band augmented on this occasion by guest stars, and their cut is irresistible. Klimperei also have one of the strongest tracks, with an arrangement not that far from a Snakefinger record. Also here – Norscq, Chazam, Phoneme, Dragibus and many more. Solid entertainment, even for those of us who don't come from the West of France. May it lead to a Ptôse revival worldwide.

ED PINSENT 24/08/2005
www.musearecords.com

Grand Orchestra d'Ordinateurs (GOO)
Tableaux
FRANCE FIBRR RECORDS FIBRR 007 CD (2003)

This one seemed pretty interesting at first, but I wouldn't advise you to waste any time looking for a copy! It's arty computer music done by a bunch of very 'serious' French guys. The enclosed booklet is a bit confusing, and it's far from clear what's going on in the course of the work, or who's doing what (if anything). I'm not sure if the players were all in the room together at the same time, or if they opted to do it over the Internet, all operating their devices at remote distances. At any rate, whatever method was used, they certainly feel they're earned the right to call this experiment an 'open laboratory of music', where every sonic event is unique and each performance comes out different to the last one. And what do we hear on

disc? Not much, Jean-Marie! A lot of silence, a bit of clumping around, and short bursts of vague formless noise, taking place inside a vast concert-hall styled echoing zone. Or hoover noises, like riding on board a jet plane. Or portentous and dreary dull drones, and electronic throbs. Each gesture seems precious to these eunuchs, as though they're afraid of putting down anything that's short of perfection. How incredibly tedious it is! Imagine a cocktail party where everyone is deliberately ignoring each other because they're playing some silly society game. And even that would be more fun than hearing this stupid record. Why is it that when people develop these complicated conceptual set-ups using computers, common sense is abandoned, and everyone invariably leaves their brains at home? Worthless, pretentious, nonsense!

ED PINSENT 24/07/2005
http://fibrr.apo33.org

Various Artists
Je Suis Un Étranger
FRANCE RONDA RND 05 CD

An offbeat comp from the French Ronda label. The opener is a foreign language lesson with a disco beat backing, which sets the theme – every track uses elements of spoken word, usually spoken in the native language of each of the contributors, whose nationality is emphasised on the sleeve. Dutch, Japanese, Swiss, Hungarian, German, French and others are included in this pan-international selection. In the case of Transbeauce's piece 'Sven', the speech is cut into a clever rhythmic pattern, but the majority of the tracks are just hopeless – really dull, commonplace electronica and beats. The stated intention was to 'mix all the diversities of language and music style in a coherent record which is dancing, experimental and full of energy.' Fails on all those accounts. If there was some intended idea of 'foreigners' and communication barriers, then it backfires completely; there is zero interaction between the tracks or the artistes, no linking concepts, no exploration of anything. Each 'étranger' remains precisely that, locked into their own little sound world. Not exactly a sonic endorsement of the work of the United Nations, that's for sure!

ED PINSENT 31/07/2005
www.ronda-label.com

International and Ethnic ✪✪✪ Musics ✪✪✪

Various Artists

Thai Beat A Go-Go Volume Two

SWEDEN SUBLIMINAL SOUNDS SUBCD13 CD (2004)

Here is an interesting and eclectic collection of Western-influenced pop songs recorded in the 1960s and early 70s by artists in Thailand, with an emphasis on some of the more eccentric and off-beat aspects of Thai pop music. Ranging in style from big band music to near-psychedelic pop, the songs featured are all very good and often fun with not a pale Western imitation among them though a good number of songs are covers of Western songs popular during the same period. I find nothing racist in the idea of a Swedish record label releasing CDs of Thai pop songs to titillate other than Thai audiences as the songs under review stand up very well against Western styles of pop, many of which have their own endlessly long history of eccentricities, oddities and the plain lowbrow (I recently heard a Satan Belanger CD compilation of late 60s / early 70s French-language pop from Belgium, Canada and France and believe me, it was absolutely God-awful!) and I figure if no-one else is interested in documenting part of Thailand's music heritage so it isn't all just temple girl dancing music, Subliminal Sounds may as well do so as a way of saying thank you to all the nameless Thai maids, bellboys and other people in the Thai tourism industry who have looked after hordes of Swedish and other Western tourists lazing about on Thailand's beaches, gorging themselves in the country's bars and restaurants, giving Thai girls and women (and boys!) exotic sexually transmitted diseases and so on.

As I did with *Cambodian Rocks* (Parallel World CD-6) in a previous TSP issue, I'd like to plough through the tracks that impressed me the most (and good news, there are no girl singers with piercingly high voices) so here goes:

● Viparat Piengsuwan, 'YoK YoK' ('Jump Jump'): the constant repetition of 'yok yok' sung by a young female artist with a dollybird voice is guaranteed to put your head in a spin for the next song which is Surapon 'Ding Dong': a cover of a European pop song notable for its very groovy if spaced-out rendition of the chorus!

● Waipot Petsuwan 'Mia Chaa': a song not very different from many songs on *Cambodian Rocks* (Parallel World) due perhaps to its looping, repetitive structure.

● Sodsai Chaengkij 'Lady Madonna': this confident and sassy female singer delivers The Beatles song smartly with a mind-boggling vocal performance of the middle section which is better than the original!

● Pairote 'Tee Makhuea Pok': ('Your Cheatin' Heart'): a cute kitschy Hawaiian-style cover of the Hank Williams song in which the male singer mysteriously morphs halfway through into the late 1960s American cartoon character Alvin the chipmunk!

● Sakarin Boonpit 'Kotmorn Yoop Yap' ('All Shook Up'): the famous Elvis Presley song rendered entirely in Thai by Elvis impersonator Sakarin Boonpit whose photo complete with white Elvis suit appears on the inside CD sleeve.

● Chai Muansing 'Pee Kow Pee Ork' ('Ghosts Come and Go'): performed with a mixture of Western and native Thai instruments, this song sounds very typically Southeast Asian, at least until we reach the instrumental part where ... ah, I think Deep Purple want payment for those old 'Black Night' riffs ...

● Surapon alias The Fox 'Nang maew Pee' ('The Ghost of Catwoman'): a different Surapon from the one we met before delivers what is perhaps the best song on the CD accompanied by wacky alley cat mewling noises (and there's a dog in there as well!) before fading out in the coda in sheer fright at Catwoman's arrival!

I'd say there's definitely something for everybody (and quite possibly the odd pet or two!) on this CD which promises lots of fun and enjoyment. By focussing on a particular period of music, Subliminal Sounds have managed to capture a snapshot of a society undergoing tremendous cultural change as evidenced by the number of covers of Western songs in both English and Thai, and the appropriation of Western melodies and Western media pop culture in the service of Thai-language originals. The CD package features photos of some of the artists who appear on this compilation (just look at the fashions!), unfortunately though without captions to identify the female singers - and where can you still get those white thigh-high boots I wonder?

JENNIFER HOR 18/05/2005
www.subliminalsounds.se

Konono No 1

Congotronics

BELGIUM CRAMMED DISCS CRAW27 CD (2004)

First in a series of CDs showcasing modern urban music from Kinshasa, capital of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC, formerly Zaire but we can also call the country Congo-Kinshasa), this album features virtuoso likembe (thumb piano) player Mawangu Mingiedi's Konono No 1 whose live album *Lubuaku* was also released in 2004. Konono No 1 was founded by Mingiedi in the 1970s and he is the equivalent of band leader / lead guitarist, playing treble likembe (also known by different names in different languages of the central African region); other members of the band include two other likembe players, a 3-man percussion section, several dancers and singers (male and female) and 'Le President' Buaku Ngingulu whose role is to wander the stage and oversee the musical activities (there may be some political satire in this). The likembe itself consists of metal rods of different lengths attached piano key style to a resonator. Nearly all the instruments used by the band are made from salvaged industrial scrap materials and the amplification system used, including the megaphones, is also pretty much DIY; the resulting distortion of the band's sound plus the volume the amplification achieves have become an essential part of the group's style and performance to say nothing of the unusual niche accidentally created in this way by the band in electronic and experimental music generally.

On this recording, the sound of the likembes is sweeter and more resonant than on *Lubuaku* where it was very harsh and raw but the passion and energy behind the music are no less. Many songs begin and end with the same or similar intros and outros which I take to be the equivalent of 'Once upon a time ...' and '... they all lived happily ever after' in modern versions of Western fairy-tales. The body of the music in the songs is fast-paced with complex and varying rhythms and is usually very repetitive: the effect of course is hypnotic, intended to put the listener in a trance or trance-like mood. Different people take turns as lead vocalists, often within the same song, and are backed up by the chorus in a call-and-response structure. Unfortunately the CD fold-out sleeve does not show printed lyrics and their English and French translations but I assume the singers are commenting on issues pertinent to modern Congolese society or relaying traditional stories, lessons and songs in a way relevant to city folk, especially urban young people. And of course you can dance to the music; it's meant to appeal to the body as well as the mind and spirit.

Possibly in a Western context the danger for Konono No 1 is that the band may simply be viewed as yet another electronic trance act in a sea full of such artists and the social and cultural context of the band and its message won't be appreciated at all. Konono No 1 plays a bridging function between traditional and contemporary cultures in its part of Africa and as such is a musical expression of a society undergoing immense cultural and social change with all the attendant tensions and conflicts. I fear most people in the West won't appreciate what Konono No 1 is trying to do and will expect the band to play 'traditional' likembe music. Still the music is great from start to finish and I recommend it very highly.

JENNIFER HOR 26/04/2005
www.crammed.be

Konono No 1

Lubuaku

HOLLAND TERP RECORDS AFRICAN SERIES AS09 CD (2004)

We have here a recording of the first live gig outside Africa by Congolese band Konono No 1 (this took place in Holland) and a very exhilarating and energetic performance it is too, all 73 minutes of it! This is the kind of music the late John Peel might have been playing on his radio show had the Grim Reaper not scythed him away when It did: it's powerful, fast and urgent, and bursting with raw energy and vigour.

Dominant throughout is Mingiedi Mawangu who founded Konono No 1 in the 1970s in Kinshasa, capital of the Democratic Republic of Congo (formerly Zaire). According to the sleeve notes, the band's music derives from that of the Bazombe tribe who live near the Angolan border. Mawangu and two or three others play electrified likembes (thumb pianos consisting of metal rods attached to resonators) which they built themselves using industrial scraps and junk as raw materials and including shoulder straps which allow the musicians to play the instruments with their thumbs and fingers while standing or moving about. The acoustic effect of electric likembes is not unlike that of electric guitars played staccato: the sound is distorted in a very fuzzy way and rough, unlike the very dulcet tones of traditional thumb pianos. Mawangu senior seems to play most if not all the solo likembe parts, and a very adroit musician he is too; playing with maybe just his thumbs and index fingers, he fingers as fast as many Western pop / rock guitarists less than half his age (he is in his seventies) pick strings and change chords. He might not look as if he has much in common with 70s rock guitarists and certainly he has a quiet dignity but his playing is just as powerful and psychedelic. Other members of the band include two full-time percussionists, two male singers, one female singer/dancer, two female dancers (including a lady called Misamu Luti looking very vivacious in the sleeve photos) and 'Le President' whose role is to wander about the stage. Perhaps unusually for African popular music, the rhythms are not so important though you are very aware of them: the likembes (solo, accompaniment, bass) are clearly dominant and the singing is often of the call-and-response type. Lyrics which are sung in a Bantu language (there are many Bantu languages native to the DRC so it's best not to make a guess) appear to revolve about social situations that occur in modern Congolese society; given the precarious political climate that has existed in the country since its independence in 1960, the lyrics could very well be as daring as the band can afford.

This is a CD which I can't recommend highly enough and which should be played LOUDLY to experience some of that exuberant vibe from the Dutch gig. The overall effect of the music is hypnotic and trancey. At this time of writing, the group had just released *Congotronics 1* as part of a series by Crammed Discs on electronic music from central Africa and the advance word on that album is that it is stunning. One feels really very lucky and privileged to be able to hear this kind of raw urban music from a particular part of that continent.

JENNIFER HOR 16/03/2005
PO Box 635, 1000 AP Amsterdam, Holland
terp@theex.nl

Various Artists

Cambodian Rocks Volume 3: All Psyched Up

USA KHMER ROCKS CD03 CD (2004-2005)

Not related to the Parallel World CD of the same name whose songs and artists went unidentified due to that small label's limited resources, knowledge and contacts, this is the third volume of a separate series of CDs featuring Cambodian pop music from the late 1960s / early 70s issued by the Khmer Rocks label and using the same name *Cambodian Rocks* as though to establish itself as the definitive anthology of such music. Labels, please don't fight: any anthology of music from Cambodia's Golden Age of Pop is welcome as a valuable historical and cultural document for Khmer people worldwide, seeing that the Khmer Rouge

did a thorough job of destroying Cambodian culture and society during its 4-year reign of terror in the late 70s, and the country's present-day poverty and the threat of AIDS, H5N1 Asian bird flu and other new diseases are sure to impede cultural recovery there. Nineteen songs are featured on this CD, many of them sung by the great figures of Cambodian pop Sinn Sisamouth (5 songs including one of the bonus tracks) and Ros Sereysothea, who sings two songs that also appear on the Parallel World CD. Emphasised here is music of a rock-oriented and psychedelic bent so throughout the CD there are songs with Hendrix and Santana-influenced guitar solos; tracks with a garage rock feel; one track 'Crazy Loving You' with a light Zeppelin-style stomp (even the song's title suggests it might sit comfortably on either of Led Zeppelin's first two albums) and of course pieces with familiar Western melodies, Sinn Sisamouth's 'Other Than You' in particular using the tune from The Clovers' classic 'Love Potion No 9' - I know the tune but not its original title or artist and one of my work colleagues kindly identified these for me. The sound quality on this CD is fairly clean considering that the recordings were made over the period 1971 - 1974 when the country was being bombed by US forces which were also fighting Vietnamese Communists and the Khmer Rouge within its borders, making life difficult for everyone.

Apart from Sinn Sisamouth who apparently penned and recorded over 2,000 songs in a brief lifetime (he was in his early 40s when executed by a firing squad in April 1975, not long after the Khmer Rouge took over Phnom Penh) and Sereysothea, the singers on this CD include Eng Nary, the sweet-voiced Pan Ron and Yol Aularong who sings 'Cyclo' that's also on the Parallel World CD. Good news is that the women's singing is not screechy due to the better sound quality of the recordings. Good news is that the women's singing is not screechy due to the better sound quality of these recordings. A couple of songs are in traditional Cambodian romvong ('circle dance') style and have a beauty and dignity absent from the rest of the CD. English translations of all song lyrics are printed on the CD sleeve; the themes of love, boy-girl attraction and the normal passing of time are quite poignant considering the songs' historical context - life goes on and affirms its renewal with each successive generation of young people discovering romance even as the country was moving towards self-destruction. One feels so ashamed at the current dismal state of commercial pop music on seeing these old Khmer pop lyrics: they possess wit and a subtle playfulness, both sadly lacking in much of today's music.

I prefer the romvong songs, the Ros Sereysothea songs (if only because they are already familiar!) and 'Crazy Loving You' (again, familiarity rears its ugly head!) but with 19 songs, the CD is sure to have something to appeal to most people. Overall the album doesn't sound 'exotic' and compared to the Parallel World CD it isn't as boppy or as happy but then there's a greater variety of moods and it does have moments of fun. As for the 'plagiarism' of Western tunes, most of the Khmer artists appear to have been aware of the original Western lyrics (Sisamouth was somewhat of a multi-linguist) but decided they could do a better job writing their own original lyrics that suited themselves and their audiences instead of doing translations. Perhaps the music deserved better lyrics than what it already had! A highly recommended recording.

JENNIFER HOR 11/05/2005
www.cambodianrocks.com
www.khmerrocks.com

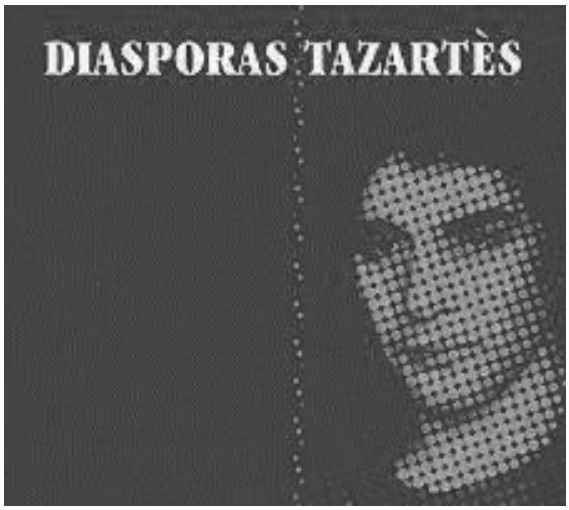
Hala Strana

Fielding

USA LAST VISIBLE DOG LVD066/067 2 x CD (2004)

Hala Strana is the name given to L.A.-based multi-instrumentalist (and member of pysch improv group Thuja) Steven R. Smith's personal homage to/rendering of Eastern European folk music. The wonders of modern technology turn him into a veritable one-man band, performing simultaneously on more folk instruments, both recognised and obscure (a bul bul tarang anyone?), than you could possibly shake a stick at. He combines these with field recordings, tape loops and flower pots (!?) to produce a suitably lo-fi sounding, drone-inspired landscape which seeks to perhaps convey something of the nature of the countries from which the sources of inspiration for this music are drawn.

This double album is split between Smith's own pieces and arrangements of traditional songs from Albania, Croatia, Hungary and Macedonia, with a Klezmer tune thrown in for good measure. In general Smith's own work tends to be somewhat less melodic than the traditional tunes, containing apparently more of the field recording/ tape loop aspect. This



is not to say that he plays it straight when it comes to arranging the trad stuff, far from it. His versions tend towards the drone end of the musical spectrum, something that must have been latent in the originals but not overtly stated. It all makes for a pleasant, dreamy ride through the outer musical reaches of some of the European Union's newer member states.

What is surprising is how much common ground there seems to be between the psych-drone aspect of Smith's own work and traditional folk music from this part of the world. Of course Smith plays up the coincidences no doubt, but the mixture makes for a pair of remarkably cohesive CDs. The people of the region are obviously privy to some secret knowledge that Smith has stumbled onto by chance, and now feels compelled to try and cover up, lest it should fall on unprepared ears. This album was originally released as a limited edition dual 3" CDR on Jewelled Antler in 2003, now changing hands on eBay for greatly inflated sums by all accounts.

AARON ROBERTSON
POB 2631, Providence, RI 02906, USA
lastvisibledog@gmail.com
www.lastvisibledog.com

Ghedalia Tazartes

Diasporas / Tazartes

ITALY ALGA MARGHEN PLANA-T 7TES 053 CD (ALSO ALGA 053CD) (2004?)

Several years ago, Alga Marghen embarked on a project to reissue all of Ghedalia Tazartes's albums on CD and this disc, combining the first and fourth albums, seems to be the most recent so far. Not knowing the artist well, I'm not qualified to say if this CD is representative of all Tazartes has done but I can tell you that after repeated listenings he is an incredibly amazing singer, able to slip in and out of different personas, ethnicities and even species as well as music genres: in one song, he drones away in the guise of a Tibetan Buddhist monk; in several songs he yodels as a shepherd in the Balkan mountains or as a nomad in the Sahara; he may sing in the style of a French chanson without a care in the world; he may be a muezzin calling the faithful to prayer; somewhere in the CD he also croaks as if suddenly aged by half a century into a toad! In several songs, Tazartes may have several vocal lines going at once, giving the impression of possessing multiple personalities. Perhaps he's not as flashy as Diamanda Galas or Keiji Haino but a virtuoso he most certainly is with a remarkable control over his pipes, able to sing extended passages at the extremes of his vocal range - and when was the last time you heard Galas or Haino crooning like a death metal dog?

Needless to say the music itself varies as much as Tazartes's singing does; sometimes there's no musical accompaniment. Everything is sung in French which might seem a bit odd since there are so many exotic and avant-garde styles of music featured here (one expects a song like 'Yama Yama' to be sung in some obscure Berber dialect) but it all jells really well together and I don't feel as if I've been on some breathless round-the-world trip offered by a cheap TV quiz show packing in a load of ethnic musical stereotypes and kitsch. For one thing, the music is kept minimal and secondary to the real star (the voice) and the production is basic. Song titles are quite unusual and hint at the strange world

Tazartes inhabits in the music: 'Le crabe ne joue jamais a la poupee' ('The crab never plays against the doll'): 'Mourir un peu' ('To die a little'); 'Quasimodo Tango' (now how would you dance that?), to name a few.

This is a very highly recommended CD to all lovers of experimental fare and radical virtuoso singing. In case my CD recommendations don't carry much weight with you because I've been tossing them around like paddlepop sticks in these pages, this album was nominated by Finnish band Kemialliset Ystavat as one of their ten favourite albums for 2004 - now we know an inspiration for that group's fairy voices!

JENNIFER HOR 09/08/2005
Available from www.forcedexposure.com and www.volcanictongue.com

Various Artists (recorded by John Levy)

Tibetan Buddhist Rites from the Monasteries of Bhutan

BELGIUM SUB ROSA SR222 2 x CD (2005)

These are splendid recordings of 'Tibetan' Buddhist music (actually Bhutanese Buddhist music as some tracks are dedicated to deities specific to parts of Bhutan but nevertheless the music on the whole is part of Tibetan music) made in 1971 by UK ethnomusicologist John Levy (1910 - 1976), put out on vinyl in 1972 by Lyrichord Discs and now reissued on CD by Sub Rosa. I for one am very impressed by the quality of the original recordings and the care taken to transfer them to different formats: despite the recordings' age, the music sounds fresh and its full depth and force are very apparent. Something of the primal creative force of the universe seems to be unveiled in this music particularly when the various trumpets are being played: the sound is very deep and sonorous if monotonous. The long notes of the shawms (double-reeded long horns) appear calls to ancient Himalayan mountain spirits to awake from their long slumber: midway in sound between oboes and saxophones, these instruments have a very urgent if mournful sound. The long trumpets, deep and droney, are solemn and powerful yet also very mesmerising.

The music divides into three parts over two CDs: part one, presenting the ritual music of the Drukpa Kagyu religious order, features perhaps the most solemn and droney music and might be considered 'archetypal' in so far as Tibetan Buddhist music can be considered to use definite or prescribed forms and structures; part two, presenting rituals and dances of both the Drukpa Kagyu and Nyingmapa orders (the two dominant religious orders in Bhutan) is similarly droney, stately and deep. In all three parts, the music can be very hypnotic and trance-inducing. Part three, focussing on temple and public ceremonies from two religious festivals features more solo performances in both music and singing and in particular the singing of wandering hermit monks which in a way is the real highlight of the recordings. With less emphasis on the droning and monotonous instruments and monastic worship, the music seems to become more inclusive and even (sort of) tribal: possibly pre-Buddhist or Bon religious elements are coming to the fore. The wandering hermits may be spiritual successors to shamans or some similar figures in the native Bon religion and perhaps that's why the solo chanting of these men seems the most remarkable and haunting of these recordings.

By necessity, many pieces featured here are excerpts of songs and rituals that would normally take hours, even days, to perform in full which explains in part the rough editing that appears on these CDs. Apart from this, the music has been left by Levy and his successors in as natural a state as possible: the end result is great clarity, spaciousness and depth that effectively convey the devotions of the monks, nuns and others who participated in these recordings, and of the force and urgency of the music.

It's a great pity that Levy himself didn't live to see the stature these recordings have gained since 1971: he died possibly from long-term injuries sustained after a motorcycle crash in 1974 that left him wheelchair-bound; brief biographical notes in the booklet accompanying CD1 portray a spiritually and physically restless and perhaps troubled man. It's an even greater tragedy that Bhutan today is the sole state where Tibetan Buddhist music and culture continue to flourish with official government sanction (apart from some areas in northern India) while in nearby Tibet the music and culture are dying out due to on-going Chinese political and cultural repression of Tibetans. This, coupled with the industrialisation of Tibet itself, partly fuelled by foreign-owned factories pushing deeper into China in search of cheaper and more compliant labour with the attendant large-scale transfers of non-Tibetan labour into Lhasa and other Tibetan towns, may eventually force Tibetans themselves to realise that their present practice of non-violent resistance is getting them nowhere and their only recourse may be mass violence with all that that could burden them with (though I doubt Westerners could be persuaded to believe they might join forces with al Qa'ida or Chechens or whoever the terrorist flavour of the month is - still, you never know) but by then, they may have lost their culture and religion. In these unfortunate circumstances, the value of these recordings as historical and cultural documents is precious.

JENNIFER HOR 17/08/2005
www.subrosa.net

Lula Cortes e Ze Ramalho

Paebiru

GERMANY SHADOKS MUSIC 043 CD (REISSUED 2005)

By now everybody's probably heard the legend of how a factory fire destroyed all the original copies of this recording when it was first released in its native Brazil in 1975 and overnight *Paebiru* became a cult psychedelic obscurity. Now that it's enjoying a new lease of life thirty years on, does it stand up to critical scrutiny under the cold light of day? The answer is a resounding YES! - the record sounds as fresh, energetic and vital now as though the musicians, led by the duo Lula Cortes and Ze Ramalho, had recorded the whole party straight to disc just yesterday with hardly any editing on most tracks. The music is a wild mixture of folksy acoustic country melodies, rock, jazz, drone, a bit of African percussive and rhythmic influence here, some stab at creating mood music there, everything all swirling together quite loosely yet paradoxically coordinated really well.

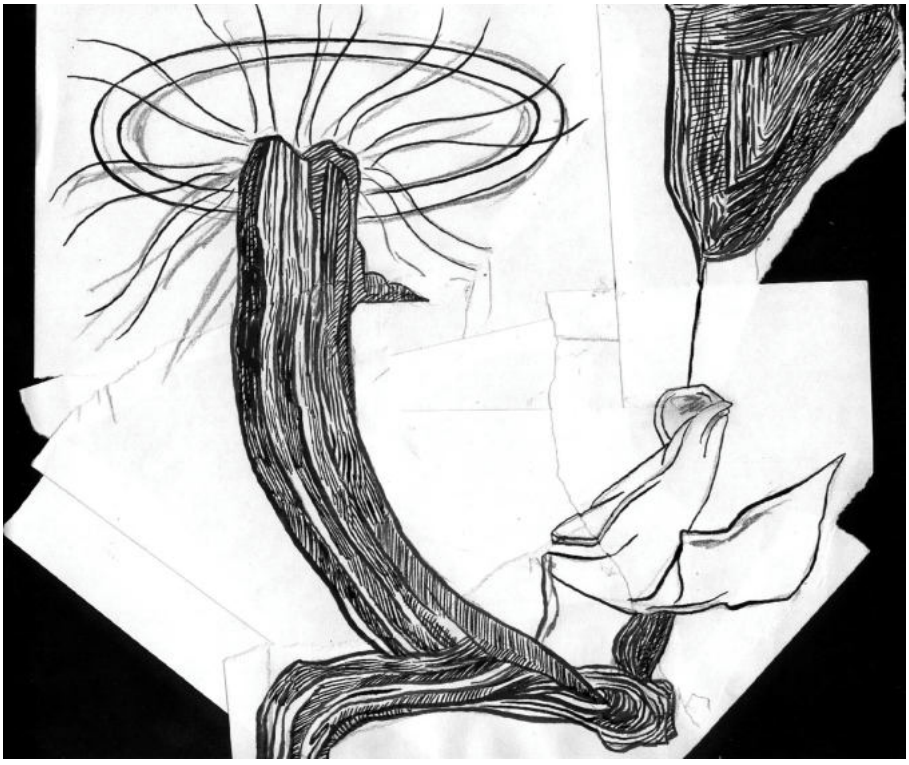
In a time when the very air was heavy with the incense of the Age of Aquarius, it's no wonder the musicians divided the recording into four sections representing the four elements found in astrology, palmistry and numerology and similar studies: Earth, Air, Fire and Water. Appropriately the Water section features beautiful acoustic guitar melodies that mimic the sound of running mountain spring water and song titles like 'Louvaçao A Iemanja' and 'Beira Mar' refer to water-related themes (Iemanja is a sea goddess, African in origin I think, whose Brazilian worshippers make offerings to her at beaches). The Earth section emphasises very rhythmic music that forces you to get up and dance or at least bounce or shuffle around in time to the driving sound; some of the most freakish piano-tickling is to be found here. Initially it's hard to figure out what distinguishes the Air section from the Earth and Water music as the styles are not greatly different (lots of lovely instrumental music that trills and sweeps you by) but certainly it's less dancey and the emphasis is more on melody than on rhythm. I'm guessing here that the musicians were going for something more ethereal and spiritually oriented and certainly the music as it progresses becomes more unstructured, improvised and strongly jazz-influenced, and comparisons with the psychedelic rock music of the day, exemplified by communally minded groups such as Amon Düül I and II, are apt here. 'Omm' featuring fuzzy droney parts and deranged piano passages is the strongest track of this section.

The Fire section features the most inspired and energetic freak-outs with 'Nas Paredes Da Pedra Encantada' the stand-out piece on the entire album: bass and organ go for broke and chase each other over hill and dale, across savannas and through rainforests and everybody else tries to catch up - the result simply takes your breath away, it really is that exhilarating and wonderful. 'Raga Dos Raios' gets a thumbs-up too for electrifying electric guitar playing.

With the music encompassing just about every wild and inspired idea and touching all bases, the wonder is that it all hangs together so well and in such an enjoyable way. The entire recording is amazing in anybody's language, even the filler material towards the end of the album sparkles. One wonders if the musicians involved were able to create another masterpiece like *Paebiru* especially after that heart-breaking fire disaster but even if they never worked together again or any subsequent material they produced is now lost, *Paebiru* has assured them their place in music history. Needless to say, this is a highly recommended recording.

JENNIFER HOR 19/10/2005
www.normal-records.com
info@normal-records.com

ATOMS OF PURE N×O×I×S×E



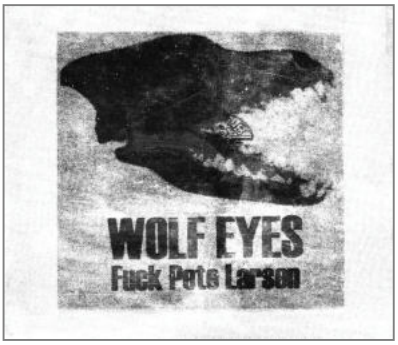
Merzbow vs Nordvargr
Partikel
UK COLD SPRING RECORDS
CSR55CD CD (2004)

Funny how people you meet years ago and lose sight of in your musical adventures have a way of bumping into you again: a decade ago while ensconced in my Cold Meat Industry phase which ran concurrently with my Labradford / Doldrums / Magnog phase, I had 2 CDs by Swedish black metal / industrial band MZ412, one of whose members was called Nordvargr. (For those of you unfamiliar with Cold Meat Industry, this is a Swedish label that looks after bands playing gothic, industrial, black metal and various fusions of these genres.) I have since divested myself of all the CMI CDs I had (didn't have many actually) and more or less forgotten what I did have (in the case of Ordo Equilibrio I have tried to forget what I had but can't seem to) so it's a pleasant surprise to see Nordvargr resurface in a collaboration with TSP furniture piece Merzbow; for this album, the two musicians exchanged and reworked each other's recordings (in Merzbow's case, these seem to include pieces from recent albums *A Taste of ...* and *Hard lovin' man* among others) without necessarily having to meet: this is the way many collaborations these days take place. I know, there are those who frown on calling such exchanges 'collaborations' as they believe collaborations should involve direct contact and some kind of agreement on common goals, criteria, whatever, but exchanges of the kind currently under review can be very interesting, especially if the musicians don't know or can't guess what the other person is going to do with their material and so an element of uncertainty, conflict or tension becomes part of the 'collaboration'.

That said, the actual music is less 'noisy' or 'industrial' than might be expected of their creators given their past history; it's very rhythm-oriented (as Merzbow's recent work seems to be now) and is also more structured and has a definite mood and atmosphere and a feeling of space (these I presume are Nordvargr's contributions). The first track 'tardyon storm' is very wintry and slightly ominous with carefully sculpted sounds inserted into the grand edifice. The second piece 'kyoufu-O' sounds more typically Merzbow but the pace is steady and regular and builds up gradually. The music isn't overwhelming and each titbit of noise can be savoured to the full. About halfway through the track we enter a tunnel where there is a constant steely howling and the bone-crushing rhythms holding the piece together now want to pulverise it out of existence. Vast frothy plumes of digital noise familiar from previous Merzbow releases are released from high pressure hoses in controlled phases. Suddenly in 'tachyon paradox' we are ejected out of the tunnel by a violent eruption beneath it and into deep space amid snippets of alien radio communication signals bouncing around the cosmos. In this relatively short yet unsettling and quiet track we find that we are doomed to float forever.

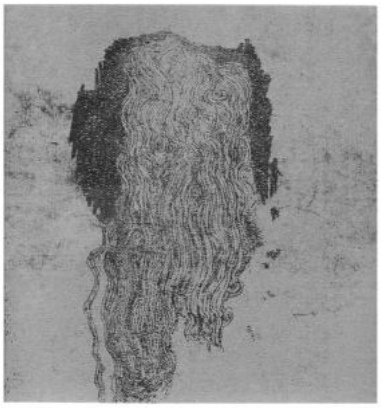
It's a very rare Merzbow release that doesn't completely overpower and suffocate the listener with dense noise and the combination of noise and ambient / isolationist music makes this album deserving of your attention. Has Merzbow with the aid of Nordvargr stumbled onto a new genre of music? Perhaps it's a bit early to tell but this recording could very well be a significant one for both artists or at least for Merzbow in his oeuvre of works.

JENNIFER HOR 14/04/(2005)
www.coldspring.co.uk



Wolf Eyes
Fuck Pete Larsen
USA WABANA ORE-40 CD CD (2004)

The original vinyl of this came out in 2002 as an unofficial LP, originally on Bad Glue, and was a follow up to *Dread*. Its print run of 600 copies sold out that same summer. Here it is again on Wabana, a label that specialises in 'official' reissues of bootlegs; also out is their version of the inevitable Sunburned Hand of the Man LP, also on Bad Glue, which we reviewed in issue 12 of TSP. Each Wabana CD is packaged in a generic



purple digipak printed with a skull'n'crossbones on the back, doubtless proclaiming death to all bootleggers who rip off musicians. Sticker on the cover of this is a fine animal skull, perhaps a cow; you'll certainly feel as though you've gone through a trip to the slaughterhouse after playing this one. In the current welter of Wolf Eyes releases it's safest just to grab whatever you can and hope for the best considering they're so 'hot' right now.

Fuck Pete Larsen delivers the bacon; in fifty minutes, two long tracks chock-full of grim, teeth-clenching noise-art. Right from the start, you can feel the utter delirium and heady enthusiasm of 'Da Guys', as they plunge into their evil work like factory slaves, pulling on the protective clothing, the arc-welding visors…picking up huge power tools and pulling chains, surrounded by huge vats of molten steel. Wolf Eyes exude this sweaty blue-collar vibe; genuine or not, they roll up their sleeves and get the job done like real men. Here they generate such a thick fug of multi-textured noise that listening to this is like being submerged, not in water but in viscous, oily sludge and other factory by-products.

Once dragged past the torturous opening segments (a bit like running the gauntlet, except all the guys are wielding sledgehammers and crowbars instead of wet towels), you enter the chill-out zones of the long and droney episodes. These are of course the exact opposite of 'calming' or 'serene' lovely music; they're comprised of pure tension, and the doomed souls who created this sound are filled with resignation at the bleak prospect of the urban hell that surrounds us. Both pieces are formed through edits, which change the mood even more drastically. Have to say this is probably one the best Wolf Eyes products currently on the market; totally essential.

ED PINSENT 10/09/2005

Wolf Eyes

Lost Sockets

USA CIP 015 10" LP (ND)

In terms of other 'grabbable' items, this ten-incher has a groovy silkscreen printed cover tipped in on a plain card sleeve which conceals a vicious little slab of silent menace. Eerie low-level tones seep out from the grooves, throbbing like the beating heart of a nasty small rodent, causing invisible vibrations which poison the atmosphere and darken the skies. Queasy moans, nauseous stomach burblings and agonised electronic squeals float on the top of this basic foundation. There's one long track of brooding maleficence…one rhythmic track, cruelly hammering your cranium with steel mallets…one haunted track, beset by wailing ghosts vanishing in amongst alien machinery. Drink in all the narrative content, of which there's plenty; it's like reading a particularly obscure and screwed-up example of drug-influenced Underground Comix from the 1960s. Quite some way from formal experimental music; what Wolf Eyes do is far too sweaty and carnivorous to be filed alongside Xenakis or Bayle. Instead, they concoct their usual fantastic electronic noise, betokening much evil intent. Limited to 1001 copies…choose a payment method now.

ED PINSENT 10/09/2005

Hair Police

Constantly Terrified

USA TROUBLEMAN UNLIMITED TMU148 CD (2005)

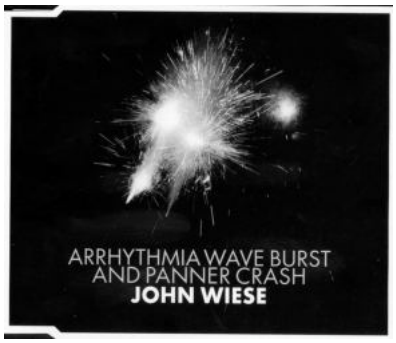
If you're sensible enough to live every waking moment of your life in dread and fear, but modern life still isn't scary enough for you, then you can improve matters by applying liberal doses of this release and thereby enhance your daily terror-quota. It's quite a beast, Clyde! At time of writing this is latest full-length release that I know of from this USA combo of wild noise-meisters who have Wolf Eyes connections. *Drawn Dead* was an earlier one, and that's one of the most intense burn-out sessions of noise ever recorded (and highly recommended too). *Constantly Terrified*, as title makes blatantly obvious, is more concerned with creating a strong atmosphere of dread and fear, with emphasis on drawing attention to the hideous pallor of doom that surrounds us. Unlike some of the old 1980s underground and industrial types, Hair Police are not interested in oblique, surrealist strategies - they go for drastic measures, waving sharp axes over their heads rather than releasing cyanide gases in the air. To put it more bluntly, they 'rock' – in the same way that a primitive man wields a big lump of hard granite to stave in skull of enemy. Blammo! If that ain't hard rock, what is?

The cover features a hard-edged woodcut image which unless I miss my guess illustrates 'The Pit and The Pendulum', that classic Poe tale. (See elsewhere this ish for a

more tasteful electro-acoustic treatment of another Poe story). In same way that the Inquisitors used psychological methods to intimidate their victim in that horrifying tale, *Constantly Terrified* piles on the horrors constantly and relentlessly, always managing to up the ante one moment to the next. More intelligent than 90% of pure noise records, this one shows the band are aiming for psychological impact, and they succeed in penetrating your subconscious with a fatal precision.

Hair Police for this recording are Mike Connelly, Robert Beatty and Trevor Tremaine; Connelly joined Wolf Eyes for the 2005 tour, and John Olson (from said band) blows sax on the title track. Other track titles include 'Rattlers Echo' and the delicious 'My Skull is My Face'; each one an episode of anguished horror, although 'The Haunting' is about the most malevolent of the cuts here, an extremely worrisome noise bleeding huge chunks of evil and dread, performed with gusto and incredible dynamics. There are odd percussion effects, long and doomy moans and howls of agony. Great! Recorded in 2004 in Lexington and Ypsilanti, these low-rent power electronics and mangled voice wailings, informed by an idiot sense of blind fury driving it all, are just what you need.

ED PINSENT 09/07/2005
www.troublemanunlimited.com



John Wiese

Arrhythmia Wave Burst and Panner Crash

USA HELICOPTER H 35 3" CD (2005)

23 minutes of lovely coarse and exciting noise. John Wiese used to be in Bastard Noise. Now he's going solo and collaborating wherever he can. Pieces on this record were recorded as support slots for bands such as Sonic Youth, The Haters and Sunn O))) during 2004 in various

locations on the West Coast of the USA. The fireworks on the cover, and the highly descriptive title, probably tell you in advance what to expect when you unleash this beast in your living room – soaring, bumping, swoops of aggression. Wiese is in full control of large quantities of sheer energy, and works on grand scale, much like Christo (if he decided to wrap things in steel and barbed wire). Pretty relentless, but not exactly brutal, more like a constant fizzing and steely textural buzz. It provides a good rattling massage for the inner body. It's also somehow empowering much like a ride in a helicopter (hence name of label) or a powerful VTOL jet. Gives wings to listener, soaring in sky and exploding, much like said fireworks. Wiese has recently toured Europe with Sunn O))), so what more could a listener require?

ED PINSENT 23/07/2005
http://home.earthlink.net/~johnwiese

John Wiese
Magical Crystal Blah Volume 2
USA HELICOPTER H 34 / KITTY PLAY RECORDS KPR 4 CD (2005)

Using John Wiese's original Magical Crystal Blah record as a source, here be 11 excellent sound artists and noiseicians remixing it – or as he would have it, 'recycling' it. Faced with the ensuing selection box of tasty abstract soundwerks, I'm not sure where to begin singing my praises, as virtually everything has much to recommend. Usually I hate a remix project with all my heart, but this is great!

Gerritt raises a maximal thunderstorm of noise, adding quiet showers of razor-sharp needles which lacerate your face and hands. Devastatingly cunning dynamics and pounding echo effects betoken Gerritt's skill at the mixing desk. K K Null churns out familiar harsh alien robotik rhythms and heavy machinery roar. How he must hate the modern world. Rockin' racket for roaring robots...Christian Renou is intent on inflicting pain, and succeeds. Rusty metal handles are turned repeatedly, then overdubbed and multiplied...the metal screams in protest...argh! It's a ride on a clapped-out oil tanker, through choppy seas.

Mike Shiflet drones a sold 'mystery' drone, with crickets chirping all around his sinister humming. Short and a bit ordinary. Panicsville do good old-skool 1990s retro table noise. Mechanical percussion loops, crackles, feedback, roars, howls, mad samples and general unpleasantness, including a lot of coughing for some reason. At last we reach a mid point with Raionbashi, and a pastoral interlude, including birdsong. Some respite, we think. Our mistake...the tranquillity is suddenly disturbed by a thunderclap followed by queasy moaning human voices. The ensuing landscape of sound is a bizarre place to be, and not at all reassuring. Freiband are quieter, but still unsettling. They suggest the sound of footfalls in a blanket of snow, softly padding along to the tune of a slowly rotating crackle noise. A classic 'your doom is impending' mood piece.

Damion Romero has previously used a bucket and wires to create a great art gallery installation piece. His piece is very busy and angsty, a knot of buzzery-blittery doings. The usual image of a handful of rusty bolts flung into the blender. RLW is the first of three heavyweights who appear at the end of the comp. He has jumbled a lot of things into a very confusing sound-picture, including some instrument plucking in amongst very loud noises. An oddly subversive assemblage that turns your head every which way, while simultaneously twisting off your ears. Karkowski, the king of the souped-up digital-industrial racket, mows his way over everything in sight like an enormous combine harvester. He leaves behind him all the preceding nine remixers wrapped up in rectangular bales of hay – with an extra large one for John Wiese! He finishes his track singing 'one man went to mow...' (not really).

Joe Colley closes the comp with 11 minutes of loops in a clever shifting pattern. No noise now, but a very disquieting tone which becomes ever-more menacing as 'heavier' forces enter the pattern, and disrupt the magnetic fields. The repeating fragments make this the aural equivalent of the early work of film-maker Malcolm Le Grice. All tracks on this great comp segue, and the whole CD slips down very nicely I must say. Which is odd for something so confrontational, strange and subversive.

ED PINSENT 27/08/2005
http://home.earthlink.net/~johnwiese

Morceaux_De_Machines
Estrapade
CANADA NO TYPE IMNT 0413 CD (2005)

Bits of this one are pretty good. Two young French guys let rip in the studio, with their very arty take on modernist electro-acoustic music; and soon make it clear that they also wish to embrace metalcore, table noise, punk rock, and indeed just about any other unruly or loud musical style that tickles their fancy. To offend 'good taste' is their avowed mission in life, upsetting and degrading decency, morality and other outmoded bourgeois values, and give this moribund musical genre (electro-acoustic music, that is) a good shot in the arm. Their presence on IMNT confirms this tough-guy stance of theirs, to some extent – IMNT is intended as the 'punk' wing of Empreintes Digitales, an otherwise respectable and staid establishment label.

Morceaux De Machines wreak their mayhem mostly on the tabletop; A_Dontigny messes around with compact discs, both prepared and unprepared CDs, and manipulates the turntable and drum machine in naughty ways. Erick D'Orion is the laptop kid, shuffling his soundfiles and also doing live electronics, FX, and voices. Every cut on this CD has some strengths, although I've been hard pressed to locate any of the much-vaunted offensiveness. An estrapade, for example, is some form of medieval torture, and said title might lead hopeful listener to expect something a bit more, well, painful. Not much pain in evidence on the opening cut 'Foncage De Pieux', although it's good trundling tuneless fuzz-noise with a bit more balls than most vacuous laptop music. 'Onanisme' is stronger, particularly with its squelchy sequencer rhythm (proving our two garcons like underground Techno music too); this short hymn to masturbation has a frenetic energy and a suitably obscene-sounding tone, very dribbly and juicy, all quite appropriate to its subject (and I ought to know).

'Placenta Compressa' has some potential too, with a threatened violence in the title which never quite emerges in the track itself. As a dish, it's served up with several awesome ladlefuls of electronic gumbo; Diane Labrosse adds turntable here, and likewise on 'Trepanation', another body-violence title. This anthem to the joys of slicing open the skull of another man starts out stormy and is filled with tasty obnoxious noises; it livens up too, as CDs are pressed into the waffle iron and the drum machine becomes a cruel surgical instrument, inflicting pain. Yet so far, still not quite as busy or as maximalist as they have promised. 'Omlegging' has another guest spot, from Japanese turntabling hero Otomo Yoshihide; deceptively, it starts out slightly quieter with its messes of digital fizz and unfocussed knob-twiddling, but it builds up into quite an unruly mess.

I do like the oppositional stance of these two gamins, but a stance is all it is; for all their 'anti' statements they don't go as far as Merzbow or TNB in the noise stakes, nor do they succeed in 'epatant le bourgeoisie'. This part of their patter is borrowed from far more radical art movements of the last

century, such as Dada, Surrealism or Futurism. I think we have a right to be faintly suspicious of their underground 'cred', which they seem to put on much like a rich kid deciding to 'slum it' by slipping casually into an expensive designer hoodie. They won't dare to risk upsetting sectors of their potential audience; after grandiose boasts of wreaking sonic violence, they qualify everything with 'our violence is not gratuitous'. Wimps! Frankly, a bit more gratuitous noise would have really made this record a lot better...

ED PINSENT 27/07/2005
www.notype.com

Hive Mind
Death Tone
USA HANSON RECORDS HN123 CD (2005)

Hive Mind are an additional bunch of evil noisette schemers from Michigan, and as such have earned the right to appear on the label of fellow Michiganites Wolf Eyes, Hanson. They have also earned it with their unique brand of ghastly noise. Unlike Wolf Eyes and Hair Police, whose approach is largely to go for the jugular and leave their fangs sunk in your neck until you surrender, Hive Mind are perhaps more subtle – they slowly peel your body apart with tiny lasers and alien death guns. This of course does not make them any less malevolent. I've rarely heard such a diabolically evil record. 43 minutes of a sinister pulsing, purring tone which becomes nastier and nastier over its duration. And it fools you, lulling you into a false sense of security. You think can endure it, decide to tough it out, but it becomes insufferable and brings you to your knees pretty damn quick.

Starts innocuously enough with low-key twitter and at first this album resembles a 'field' recording of a forest at night with plenty of insect activity but soon it's apparent that the full moon is out, it happens to be Friday 13th and strange phenomena that occur every 50 - 100,000 years begin their birth pangs beneath the forest floor. With each passing moment the ground heaves as though breathing deeply and heavily and the night creatures' chiming falls in tune with the subterranean susurrations. High-pitched drones emanate from the darkling depths as the earth's womb prepares to eject a most wondrous offspring; pretty quickly, washes of noise loops herald the child's birth, an internal engine goes into first gear. The ground caves in, soil crumbles away, propeller limbs strike out and churn tree roots and rays of light burst out of the dirt and up into the sky tearing through the tree canopy. A glowing molten being hauls its way up out of the earth and forces its way into the air, pulsing with a machine rhythm as it begins its celestial journey. On contact with the atmosphere, the biomachine's armour crackles and its internal organs throb steadily if loudly; might it be sending a message to its planet of origin, wherever that is?

Past the halfway mark, turbulence and sharp electrical currents are encountered; with fifteen minutes to go, something wounds the creature, a limb drops off and the behemoth yelps but maintains its ascent. It soon disappears, the night sky is clear again and only the organism's throbbing and industrial humming as it floats high above give any indication of a remarkable event. The limb that fell away flails on the ground, convulsing and rattling as it dies.

A fascinating and absorbing journey dominated by long drones, deep throbbing and strong industrial machine rhythms made on an analog synthesiser: this is the sort of noise ambient architecture Masonna's Space

Machine should be making. Despite the piece's title, I don't find the recording at all scary nor even particularly spine-chilling - it was so enthralling, there was no time to be frightened! Shrewd and manipulative are these Aerican conspirators of sound. Think of poisonous snakes, darting around with sudden movements, coiled and swaying, then striking with fatal force. Cobras and rattlers, every man jack of them. Deadly mesmerism! Horrible humming! Ferocious frequencies! Cruel crackling! Love it to death...and I do mean death!

RROSE SELAVY 14/04/2005
www.hansonrecords.net
www.chondriticsound.com
PO Box 7496, Ann Arbor, MI 48107, USA

Hrvatski
Irrevocably Overdriven Break Freakout Megamix
USA ENTSCHULDIGEN CD (2005)

With a title like that, this CD pretty much reviews itself. A sprawling and chaotic electronica mush-fest, with plenty of added disco beats and dancefloor beats, courtesy of American Keith Fullerton Whitman wearing his arty DJ hat. This CD contains 91 very short tracks which play back over course of only 40 minutes, which means that everything keeps changing very quickly all the time – heaven help you if you play it in shuffle mode! DJ Hrvatski baked this batch of disco biscuits playing live at the RX Gallery in San Francisco, as part of the 'Jiffy Scuttler' series of shows. If you have ever assisted at this particular entertainment, please do enlighten this magazine as to what it means...

To maximise the confusion, KFW brought with him a large part of all his recorded work in a sack full of CDs and minidiscs, and in performance he played back as much of it as he possibly could in the allotted time – presumably using a lot of simultaneous layers together, and adding scads of other foreign elements too. You can probably imagine the results even without hearing this mess; it's just a series of unrelated noises and beats, and the overall tone is very squelchy and squishy. A bit like descending into a huge bubblebath, except the bubbles are not only laced with intoxicating drugs, but are made out of very thin glass that can easily shatter and slice open your eyeballs. Yowch.

Bubbly, frothy, electronic madness and mayhem, pinned together with dancefloor tactics. Very warped version of dancefloor I might add. In fact this is about the only aspect of this CD which I don't dig. The breakbeats seem very conventional to me, even if used in a very unconventional manner. But there's no denying this is a really 'up' piece, filled with assurance and a great sense of fun, even if it doesn't reach the energy levels of say High Rise (as is claimed). And weirdly, the apparent chaos starts to appear very contrived and controlled after a while, much like the Ernie Bushmiller approach to drawing an exploded television set which leaves the *neatest* pile of rubble you ever saw in your life. Interestingly, Jon Leidecker (aka Wobbly) recorded the performance.

ED PINSENT 23/07/2005
www.entschuldigen.com

Putrefier
Hypertension Classics Vol 2
UK HARBINGER SOUND HARBINGER030 4 x CD (2005)

A four CD set of some of the 'purest' atoms of noise you could hope to find anywhere. Label boss Steve Underwood seems to set great store on the achievements of Mark 'Putrefier' Durgan, having released a vinyl LP

of his (*Simulated Vapours*) some years ago and now actively championing the intellectual dimensions to his work; this release, we are told, is not mindless wallowing in high-volume unpleasantness, but is evidence of creator's intelligence and his wider frame of reference outside of the normal confines of 'noise', for example the Swiss improvisers Voice Crack, and the French electro-acoustic label INA GRM, are referenced.

True, there's a tonne and a half of sonic variety on CD one: harsh sounds, soft sounds, loops, continuous droning, evil buzzing, mysterious noises, dynamics, voice samples, loud volume, quiet volume, incoherent approaches, systematic approaches…it certainly made me want to keep listening. Though certainly very spontaneous in his creations (presumably everything was recorded live or in one take, but who knows these days?), Durgan certainly doesn't neglect the deep structure of the work that makes it worthwhile for a listener to delve in, and keep examining the fascinating formations of strata.

Strangely, boredom also starts to set in quickly. CD Two opens with a revisited version of the *Simulated Vapours* opus, here titled 'Last Mix', suggesting that he's about as fed up with remixing it as we are with hearing it. It consists of burning, smashing, destruction, things being boiled in acid or bombarded with powerful missiles. This is followed by an equally violent cut, where it's like being lacerated with steel knives. 'Mixturtrautonium' is a strong piece, though. The title probably refers to Oscar Sala's instrument. It's packed with more of those exciting dynamics, ranging from outer-space meteorite storms to rusty factory floors. But it also sounds somehow closed-in, very claustrophobic. Noise music can be so airless and suffocating; if you can listen to more than 30 minutes of this collection without taking a long walk outside in the fresh air, you're a better man than I am. By the time of 'Fly-Drive Simulator', which is an exceptionally impressive work, I nevertheless find I am plagued with a certain ennui. It's not that it's excessively loud, just monotonous; Putrefier often seems unable to transcend the basic materials he works with. And it's often so aggressive; no doubt it's meant to be that way, but he keeps returning to this basic 'buffeting' noise, which can be jarring, like being punched repeatedly on the chin.

Perhaps best to take this work in small doses; there will be times in your life when it's just what you need. Certainly this collection is on a quite different order to the 4-CD set of The New Blockaders, which in their case set out to present the relentless development of their pure nihilism over some 20 years. But at least there *was* development; it became worse and worse as the set progressed. Here, the differences between CD 1 and CD 4 are negligible; it's pretty much just more of the same. The artworks are a little under par, too. At least someone has thought carefully about all the surfaces that can successfully be decorated in a four CD set, but they haven't chosen material that's visually stimulating, apart from the intriguing front cover image that mixes up nature with raw technology. If we're being asked to accept this as something on a par with Merzbow's *24 Hours: A Day Of Seals*, then I'm afraid Masami Akita continues to scoop all the prizes.

On balance, old 'Puters' hasn't quite graduated to the status of 'Grand Master' yet, despite being active in the noise field since the mid-1980s. But at his best he has energy, ideas, and a lot of control over both. Recommended then, with some tiny reservations, to all fans of alien landscapes, weird journeys, pounding rhythms, and concrete sounds, or just fans of concrete itself.

ED PINSENT 19-20/09/2005
PO Box 7133, Nottingham, NG5 7WE, UK
www.harbingersound.org

A.M. Salad

Lo-Fi for Hi-Fi

USA EERIE MATERIALS EM19 / GOLD SOUNDZ GS#34 / LITTLE MAFIA RECORDS LM041 / NIHILIST RECORDS NIHIL 25 / SLOTH JINNI SJ002 / SUNSHIP RECORDS SUN 51 / WHITE TAPES CD [(2004)]

Terrific CD of collage and noise-work from American Keith Childress. It's a compilation drawn from his work created during 1994-1997, and everything was previously released on cassette. Describing what he does as an 'aural scavenger hunt', Childress does it with old records, pieces of discarded junk, common household items, broken instruments, and any found sounds he can scoop up in his fishing net. In this way, he strives to give a 'new voice' to 'intentional and unintentional sound, lost in time and space'. I like the idea of reclaiming lost things; he seems to be doing more than just recycling, as many utilitarian players do. Like a miniature version of the Statue of Liberty, he stands on the shore of aural experience beckoning the 'huddled masses' and assorted orphans of lost sounds to come to him.

Said orphans respond to the call in large numbers, and a generous bounty results on this disc, 14 substantial and densely-packed tracks of information crammed into 70 minutes. You'll feel exhausted after that time, stuffed with these huge buckets of thick sonic soup and croutons of fragmented debris. Though it opens with a salvo of highly noisy cuts, a lot of the disc is quieter and comprises simple and strange beauty. Loops are a very big part of it; his old vinyls must be so well-worn that they're beyond distressed. He never uses his records in an ironic way; indeed the sounds are not identifiable. It's all about textures, combining things you wouldn't normally hear in any context, outside of a visit to a biscuit factory being over-run by mad goblins during half-term week.

At worst this kind of formless din could be dismissed as self-indulgent nonsense and messing around, but when it's done with such gusto who could complain? Evading the possibility of any sort of 'meaning' in his work, Childress assigns surreal cut-up titles to his pieces that are simply nonsensical, for example 'Unbeknownst Lava', 'Hidden Knuckle Napkins' and 'Zebulonic Meander'. This shows you clearly have to approach this stuff with a sense of fun, and indeed a sense of child-like simplicity. The Childress is father to the Man. Noisy fun from trash – I'm all for it. Take a Zebulonic Meander today!

ED PINSENT 13/09/2005
www.eeriematerials.com
www.tibprod.com/goldsoundz.htm
www.littlemafia.com
www.nihilistrecords.net
slothjinni@yahoo.com
freenoise.org/sun
123 Kingsland Avenue, NY 11222 USA

The New Blockaders and Nobuo Yamada

Prickle/Crevice

USA PSYCHFORM RECORDS PFR 04 LP (2005)

Another recent collaboration project in the name of The New Blockaders, of which the 'buzzwords' are destruction, nihilism, and smash…the usual TNB agenda in fact. The record contains a horrible jumble of inchoate noise that's so determinedly anti-music, it makes a train wreck sound like a

Shostakovich symphony. It seems to involve mangled metal, breaking glass, and human victims who issue vile wailings as they suffer at the hands of their tormentors. The actual sound produced may have been arrived at by other means, but the effect is about the same. There's a lot of layers of activity documented in the grooves, but in terms of playback it's all the same dynamic start to finish – as of vast tonnes of trash and metal

junk sliding down a long chute and tumbling over a cliff. Somebody should organise a performance art event along these lines, but after all the trash has gone down the chute, what next? You're left asking similar question as this record completes its meaningless task. A one-sided 12-incher, pressed in clear vinyl, 400 copies; there was a deluxe art edition too, but even this version has probably sold out already. The cover art celebrates the glory and richness of rust, iron and padlocks, and peeling rustproof paint.

ED PINSENT 03/09/2005
www.psychform.com

Cock E.S.P. + Appliancide vs Waffelpung + Wafflepung

Split LP

NORWAY SUNSHIP SUN 43 / ROGGBIF RECORDS RR009 CD (2004)

Despite the title *Split LP*, this isn't actually on vinyl, but then it does play for a reasonably long time and it certainly is split. As you will be, shortly. Aye, a grand noise awaits you if you snag a copy of this and wham it on the CD player to consternation of innocent neighbours. Cock ESP are an American noise trio, have been doing it for about 12 years already, and they play with Appliancide here. 10 short tracks of obnoxious racket are the gifts they bear, all very sample heavy. Voices, radios, other music – laid out with maximum distortion, howling fuzz, by young men with horror and dread weighing heavily in their hearts. With the distortion in particular, it can come across like a slightly less sarcastic of V/VM have done in their time. There's a lot to get your teeth into with the work of these guys! At an average of only 100 seconds per ditty, this keeps listener ever-alert and provides a 'mind-cleanser' special – short, sweet bursts of raging anarchy and fierce power. The opening salvos bring down the house...dodge those falling roof beams. By track five, the ferocity gives way to something less loud in volume, but still packed with insane, heavily ironic juxtapositions of random sounds, found recordings and nonsense. It's constantly surprising and exciting. All 10 cuts are spliced together for continuous playback, no gaps, plenty mayhem. Bring own crash helmet.

Wafflepung and Wafflepung are from Norway. They complete remainder of split LP with a single 16-minute cut called 'STD with DIY spirit'. Gathering up anything they can get their hands on in their bear-like paws, they fling music, noise, field recordings, pianos, birdsong, and science-fiction movie sound effects into their cauldron made of bronze, brewing up a mad and messy collage in as much time as it takes to say Boo to a goose. W&W are not really into noise, so much as confusion and head-scratching; their slightly-surreal sequence of sounds will keep you guessing. After the stridency of this record's flip-side, it has a certain charm.

ED PINSENT 20/08/2005
www.freenoise.org
www.roggbif.com
www.cockesp.com
www.waffelpung.com

Elliott Sharp / Merzbow

Tranz

USA CAMINANTE RECORDINGS cami 002 CD (2005)

Fairly inessential Merzbow-related product here. It's workmanlike, but unexciting. Incidentally there's another solo record by 'our man' received this season, something to do with rats, which sounded like a promising theme, but that one's so dull it probably won't even make it to review stage. Here, Masami locks horns with famed New York veteran noisester (also guitarist, producer and composer) Sharp. Disappointingly, however, all they do is go through the usual routine of swapping sound files and materials for the other one to remix and process; there's no evidence they even met up to collaborate. The first two are 'MARES1' and 'MARES2', acronyms I take to mean Masami Akita Remixes Elliot Sharp. The first 'MARES' is a routine run-through of rumbly-pumbledy concrete-mixer styled mayhem, with added textures of coarseness streaming into the mix like so much raspberry syrup on an ice-cream cone. Though certainly noisy, this mediocre example of power electronics lacks dynamics, seems to be stuck in neutral, and the sounds employed as raw material are very far from engaging to the ears. We've got 12 minutes of not much happening. Eventually this one just runs out of steam and stands in the middle of the swamp huffing and puffing like a big angry water buffalo. If only said water buffalo could have made it another 20 feet, he might have managed to destroy the village ahead, and trample underfoot all helpless inhabitants. Now that would have been worth hearing!

The second 'MARES' is a shade more successful. Much quieter than the first noise-filled escapade, it conveys a fluttering sensation akin to one thousand wildly spinning gyroscopes, all balancing on a network of steel washing lines. At the same time, it promises an exploration of a strange microscopic dimension, and also incorporates elements of Masami's 'nature boy' kick, with flurries of virtual birds and insects brought into play. Having created this dark and interesting mood, it enters a further wiry and metallic phase, and exhibits the sorts of sounds I tend to associate with Elliott Sharp, him with his frenetic approach to playing (or perhaps strangling) the electric guitar. Still by no means a 'classic' Merzbow episode; it seems unconvincing for him, lacking real force.

There follow two examples of Elliott remixing Masami. 'ESRMA1' opens strongly with its big tidal waves of phased white noise, with dribbling electric filth and siren noises piled on top like buckets of digital treacle. Sharp uses some good dynamics here, such as radical speeding up and slowing down of the pace, and there's a lot more substance to the noises on offer. Of which there is a plentiful supply. At times, one senses Elliott is overdoing it slightly, using every single colour supplied to him from Masami's paintbox, simply because he can. And there's some mad electric guitar soloing, which is another Sharp trademark. Am I raving about the wrong tracks? There's more energy on this cut than anything else we've heard so far, but it's a futile, sterile energy, flailing around with no end in sight. This gibbering, incoherent mess trails away into a blazing inferno at the end, which is perhaps the only place it has left to go.

'ESRMA2' isn't up to much either. A rather clichéd sound portrait of 'a day on the factory floor', amounts to a theme which has been done to death by industrial and metal bands in the 1980s...clanging, clunking, frenetic loops and frottage-fuelled energy. This CD as already noted has a very unappealing sound from start to finish, as antiseptic as drinking pure TCP, and somehow sapped of real vigour. Both these boys are major players; both are making a fair effort; but results are mediocre. This is the first in a series from this label whose intention is to pair up Merzbow with 'some of the most important artists creating music today'.

ED PINSENT 24/07/2005
www.caminanterecordings.com

Phô

This is Handiwork

NORWAY HUMBUG 040 CD (2004)

A tasty selection of disjunctive, crazed, live electronic noise. 10 tracks recorded in the studio in 2003. Phô arrive with added

attraction of two drummers in the band. Bjørnar Habbestad is the main man, not only playing the mad live electronic noise and digital roarage, but also doing post-production and editing work; and presumably adding the wacky titles to each cut, such as 'Sleaze Induced Tastes and

Pleasures' or 'Please Let me Disrobe You'. Morten J Olsen and Nicolas Field are the said two drummers propelling their visionary leader's egocentric noise workouts into the stratosphere. The trio met up in Amsterdam in 2001, where we are told there was a 'highly international new music scene'.

This is gritty stuff, but there ain't much depth to it somehow, and in places it even seems somehow contrived, in spite of all the frantic kinetic energy that's being generated. For one thing, these guys are unable to rock out, despite having two drummers, and they struggle to achieve any sort of vibe with their music, other than a noisy one. But I do appreciate the roughness and harsh qualities to the sound. In any case, their distanced attitude to the whole 'rock' schtick is evidenced not only in their poised playing, but also in the contrived titles such as those quoted above. No rock song would even get off the ground with a sentiment so ungainly expressed as 'Please Let me Disrobe You', and this is probably the whole anti-rock point. John Hegre adds guest guitar here and there, and Sir Duperman did the production in his own studio. The cover is both ugly and wacky, a photo depicting a pig receiving artificial insemination. Despite their attempts to join that pig, Phô remain too 'clean' to really deliver a good solid lasting effect, and can't seem to fully immerse themselves in the filthy trough of noise. Accordingly, and again I say this if you're into the semiology of CD covers, the pig remains surrounded by a clean white field.

ED PINSENT 23/07/2005
www.tibprod.com/humbug.htm

Maja S. K. Ratkje / Lasse Marhaug

Music for Faking

CANADA C3R RECORDS C3R 004 CD (2005)

I certainly had high hopes for this one. Two 'greats' from the Norwegian experimental artnoise scene. Lasse Marhaug, in a team-up with one half of Fe-Mail, a tabletop noise duo whose work I regard highly even though I've only heard one LP. Lasse's a big fan of

'em too. They've worked together before, and made *Music for Shopping* and *Music for Loving*. Then they collaborated again, in the studio in Oslo in July 2004, and came up with these 7 cuts. The finished product has a terrible title, a terrible cover, and terrible track titles. But I thought I shouldn't let any of that put me off.

Well, the music's terrible too. It starts off very dense, and stays that way – too much going on at once, very nearly indigestible. Too many colours, not enough structure; samples, loops, music, noise, beats, patterns, no patters – everything relentlessly changing in a big whirling mess. Nothing for the mind to latch onto; feel like I'm trapped in a candyfloss making machine, whirling quickly around on a spindle, while brightly-coloured syrups are poured in.

As CD proceeds, the duo exhibit various self-conscious efforts to be 'wacky' and 'weird'. The wackiness is stated up front with these titles and that cover, but carries over into embarrassing stuff like the fifth track, 'The sad clown called the law', which is built around a loop of an irritating laugh, and lots of other silly, meaningless parts clamped around it. The 'weirdness' comes from the disjunctive layering and juxtaposed voice samples, but even this is very carelessly done. It just comes over as very crass. The fourth cut 'How much noise can we make (let's find out)' is like a nightmare version of a nightclub, with excessively speeded-up beats and the sonic equivalent of epilepsy-inducing strobe lighting. Elsewhere, naff easy-listening samples are brought in, the most banal and obvious samples you could think of, constituting a major lapse in taste.

This is a ridiculous record of flatulent nonsense, and we deserve far better from these major talents.

ED PINSENT 13/09/2005
www.c3r.ca

Emil Beaulieu

Harbinger Sound Presents America's Greatest Living Noise Artist

UK HARBINGER SOUND HARBINGER 025 2 x LP (2005)

Late arrival – a double-vinyl set by Ron Lessard, released by his UK emissary, and a very tasty artefact of noiseician's craft it is too. This is not one for taking home and enjoying on your stereo – you need to take it out to dancehalls, sports arenas and other public places, and play both discs simultaneously over the PA as loud as you possibly can. Public immolation will be your reward for such an anti-social action. Arriving in a sleeve that just drips with sarcasm and heavy irony; leaving aside the deliberately ludicrous title, we see the front cover depicting Lessard as a seedy-looking US Presidential candidate, a faded Old Glory behind him, under the headline 'AMERICA'S GREATEST NOISE'; while the back cover shows him trampling over the wreckage of 'classic' noise LPs from the past, by such greats as Hijohkaidan, New Blockaders, C.C.C.C., and Whitehouse. The slogans printed on the back cover – which may be the 'track titles' – boldly reaffirm his 'I am the greatest' status as he supplants both Pain Jerk and Putrefier, and even tells his benefactor Harbinger Sound to 'Fuck Off', while simultaneously pointing out 'Any Moron Can Make Noise Music' and 'I Ought To Know'. Enough mixed messages for you there? Wait till you try playing the records! Every other band is sabotaged with a lock-groove that'll make mincemeat out of your stylus, while sending you insane with its deadly noise-repetition hell; while at least two sides have been seriously defaced with scratched and erratic run-in grooves that appear to been incised by a crazed psychopath armed with a blunt engraving tool. Assuming you can negotiate these obstacles, the noise that awaits you is decent enough shrieking metallic thrash and walls of battering feedback garbage. A seriously-retro slab of table noise for all you diehards; at least its creators have a sense of humour, as they chuckle away at the futility of it all...

ED PINSENT 15/10/2005
PO Box 7133, Nottingham, NG5 7WE, UK
www.harbingersound.org

The Metal Men

Not so much a review section this as a chatty and picture-oriented round-up of various records I've been buying in the area of – erm – extreme metal, heavy metal, mathcore, stoner, doom, gloom...who knows what to call it? Not me. All I know is it's entirely by American bands. You could try reading *Terorrizer* magazine, but you're also advised to visit www.aquariusrecords.org, where (although their real specialist area is Black Metal) they can also advise on the most impenetrable and unlistenable records to waste your money on. For further noisy horrors, read the Black Metal section this issue.
ED PINSENT 01/10/2005

Converge
Jane Doe
USA EQUAL VISION RECORDS EVR 61 CD (2001)
Converge
You Fail Me
USA DEATHWISH DW 39.1 LP (ND)

So far this pack of ravenous wolves are proving to be one of the more violent, sick and anti-social of the bunch. Also one of the most intelligent and clear-sighted. The best record is probably *Jane Doe*, which I think keeps getting singled out as some form of benchmark of quality. Also got on vinyl *You Fail Me* and another compilation of older stuff with a nifty cover. The sensation that comes across from their music is mostly totally overpowering. The playing is just too dense, impossibly dense; there must be like a zillion overdubbed guitar lines on here. But it's also totally intense, and rather than turning into a field of mud and murk through excess of processing, each recording is horribly clear and devastatingly sharp. Along with the vast bucketloads of guitars, there are vocals which scream and howl in a distressing histrionic fashion, and jet-propelled drumming that keeps virtually every song they do moving at a frighteningly fast rate. Hmm, just thinking about it as I nurse my belaboured ears, exactly what pleasure do I derive from listening to Converge? The intensity and the clarity of it I suppose, and also the complexity of the work, because like

many of these 'mathcore' bands they possess tremendous technical skill. There's no attempt to hide ineptitude behind loud volume; what you have here is great playing, delivered at loud volumes, just to overstate the case. *Jane Doe* has some kind of subtext meaning. I think it attempts to express the pain and heartache of a doomed relationship, or a break-up, in terms of a dead body. 'Jane Doe' of course is the standard US police name given to an unknown cadaver. The whole CD confronts and explores this pain in all its excruciating detail. An emotional wringer for your nerves! The *You Fail Me* LP is pressed in white vinyl, but there are lots more variant pressings most of which are sold out probably - all part of the general strategy (not confined to this band, I might add) to make you buy the same record three or four times over. It has a tasteful severed hand on the cover, but no Satanic or Witchcraft elements here (at least I hope not). The title alone is like a stinging nettle, an accusatory diatribe, again attempting to deal with the painful emotions surrounding your friends, your hopes and dreams, your dependencies and needs. The best image they can come up with for designating all of this is a severed hand. As you can gather, these boys take no prisoners!

Sightings
Arrived in Gold
USA LOAD RECORDS LOAD 065 LP (ND)
Sightings
Absolutes
USA LOAD RECORDS LOAD 048 CD (ND)

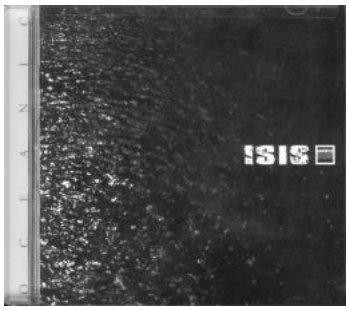
Twisted and nasty electric guitar rock is what Sightings excel in. Got a nice vinyl copy of *Arrived In Gold*, CD version of which I see in second-hand shops everywhere. Howcum the punters don't dig it? I very much care for it. This band is completely chaotic and illogical. All I can recall at the moment is long bursts of feedback and noise that stop and start and don't get anywhere. I think it's the eccentric production which gives it this rather uncertain feeling. All the recorded elements seem to have been arranged in the wrong priority – too much amp hum up top, while vaguely muttered vocals are buried way down. Chris Freeman is on here somewhere. Plus the playing itself is mostly aimless riffing and noodling, but delivered with a relentless fuck-you attitude that is designed to be

very annoying. No wonder the squares hate it! Also got an earlier CD *Absolutes* which has a sketch of an illegal whisky still on the cover. This one is slightly more conventional with some boppin' beats you can dance to, but still few concessions are made – there's a lot of mean, pinched, fuzzy noise and mangled guitar playing. An odd, niggardly crew. They're from NYC and had a live CDR on the Free 103.9 label.

The Dillinger Escape Plan
Miss Machine
USA RELAPSE RECORDS DEP:MM 6589-2 CD (2004)

This elaborate package (it contains an audio CD and a DVD, showing them playing live and making the CD in the studio) has a triple fold out arrangement reminiscent of a Yes LP I used to own. This one I gather is meant to be their 'master statement'. I think I've managed to hear it precisely once. Again, it's too intense for my sensitive feelings and I can only face it at certain times of the evening. The message here is 'wimps keep out!' What's clear once again is the tremendous skill that has gone into it, although this bunch are far more 'loopy' than Converge and have a very off-the-wall approach to just about everything they do. It's not too far-fetched to liken them to The Magic Band. There's the same initial sense you have that it's all just noisy screaming chaos, and then when you get used to it you can truly listen and perceive the deep structure to the work. Very layered, almost composed, hence the terms 'math-rock' or 'mathcore' to account for its statistical density. I have no idea what any of the songs mean, or what they may portend. I need a few more years to fully digest this one! Nor have I as yet investigated any back catalogue before this release, but maybe things would fall into place if I did. The collage artworks on the cover (more in the booklet too) are totally nuts and make me feel ill.

Isis
Oceanic
USA IPECAC RECORDINGS IPC-32 CD (2002)

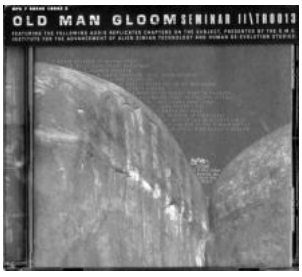


Oceanic is their second full-length release methinks. 2004's *Panopticon* was the third, reviewed last ish glowingly, by me. In some ways I like this earlier one even better. *Oceanic* sums up their sound and perhaps their very ethos in just one word! Grandiose, restless, stately, deep blue, and err...salty. There are also various 30-minute Isis EPs on CD which could also be interesting. What appeals to me about this one is it's mostly instrumental, it goes on for a very long time, maintains a rigid steady beat and doesn't go in for excessive guitar soloing. The excess is all contained in the loud volume, and the duration – they must have arms of iron to sustain this playing live, let alone in the studio. As for you, you'd better bring a packed lunch if you want to get from one end this CD to the other!

Old Man Gloom
Christmas
USA THE MAGIC BULLET RECORD CO MBL060 2 x LP (ND)

Old Man Gloom
Seminar II
USA TORTUGA TRO013 CD (ND)

This lot are one of my favourites and a fine discovery for me. They've been going for a few years now, Aaron Turner from Isis is the main man and they have members from other great bands, eg guests from Cave In and Converge on *Seminar II*. Most listeners find them a bit 'proggy', which may be what appeals to me. They certainly have a narrative sense to all their work and the music is all drawn-out and expansive. Their 'schtick' is that they alternate between loud and raucous heavy metal guitars with the expected screaming vox, and quieter 'ambient' moments of electronic mood music. Quite often shifting unexpectedly between the two in the midst of one track, via the gift of the mixing desk and the tape splicer. Whichever mode they choose, you can be sure the music is always vaguely threatening and paranoid. Of course there is a lot more to it than that. One particular thing they do so well is using found voices from television or phone conversations. Or maybe it's just the performers themselves speaking and acting, recorded in a distorted way. Either way it gives your ears something else to follow while you're trying to tune in to the musical threads. All these speech elements are purposely recorded and mixed so that you can't quite hear what they're saying. This familiar technique works well here, especially when used in support of Old Man Gloom's 'concept theme', which is something to do with genetic mutation. There are half-suggested stories of experiments with apes going horribly wrong in secret labs. Very Dr Moreau I must say. Plus they spread this concept out across several recordings, so you need to 'get the set' to stand any chance of half understanding it. The covers of two CDs join together to form a nice panorama of Monument Valley I think. Got quite a few releases by this bunch now but my favourites are *Christmas* and *Seminar II*. *Christmas* is available in many formats (again, a ruse to make you buy the same record repeatedly), but mine is a double LP of which one disc is pressed in orange vinyl. The USA version of this has completely different artworks for the covers! It's a fascinating odyssey of a record, filled with strangeness and sadness. Recorded around 2000-2001. Arrives with a sumptuous booklet packed with weird doodles and very little information. *Seminar II* is on CD and is one of the most confusing records I ever heard. You've only got to put it on and five minutes later you're in a thick fug of mystery. Sounds fantastic too. All these Old Man Gloom records are recommended.



Capricorns
Capricorns
UK RISE ABOVE RISEMLP54 MINI-LP (2005)

A fine quartet of slightly devil-fixated rockin' guys. At least half of this mini-LP is fantastic, particularly 'Comrades in Tears'. A really solid piece of slow and menacing doom rock with a good steady beat, plus plenty dynamics in the playing. The sound is crisp and clean. Definitely plugs in to satisfying my continuing Black Sabbath requirements. Again, favoured by this listener because mostly instrumental. I've nothing against that 'screaming' voice which seems the standard mode for lotsa metal records these days, but it's also kind of reactionary and monotonous. Since I like instrumentals so much, I think I also need to investigate Pelican as soon as I can.

Unearthly Trance
In The Red
UK RISE ABOVE RISELP55 LP (2005)

Fantastic band name and good cover too, mainly aligning itself with the more bloodthirsty clans of the multiple Black Metal schools, though their music is mostly straightforward gloom and death. Then again there's a lot of explicitly Sataic content in the lyrics – blood, fire, pentagrams, hell, death, fear, whores...I like the implied violence in the music but it does tend towards the sludgy. Maybe it's the red vinyl making it sound that way, already deteriorating. Also perhaps too many words getting in the way of the music. Good antisocial buzz from their excessive amps though and the bass guitar is particularly slippery and vile. Slow and horrible torture. They don't quite send me into the promised unearthly trance however. Isis manage to do that more often.

Goatsnake
Trampled Under Hoof
USA SOUTHERN LORD sunn 33 CD (2004)
Goatsnake
1 / Dog Days
USA SOUTHERN LORD sunn 34 CD (2004)

Maybe a bit shameful to admit owing anything by these clowns! Personally I enjoy what they do, but they are much more in the area of conventional rock riffing than anything mentioned thus far and make preceding goons seem almost avant-garde! If you like Black Sabbath you will love this band. In fact they practically are Black Sabbath in almost every regard. Got *Trampled Underhoof* from 2002, and the comp CD with their earlier work from 1999 and 2000 reissued to cash in their on new found fame. *Trampled Under Hoof* admits to everything up front – referencing Black Sabbath *and* Led Zeppelin! How can you lose? Plus one member of Sunn O))) (Greg Anderson) involved. The vocalist Pete Stahl sounds a little affected as he works hard to convince you he's tattooed, tough-guy white trash, and the lyrics verge on the clichéd – a lot of stock phrases about fast cars and breaking the law, but at least he does actually sing rather than issue a throat-shredding screech. Besides when you have such a fantastic heavy sound booming out of your speakers, who could complain? A weighty production indeed. Plus they do a great cover version of The Sabs' 'Who Are You'. As with Sunn O))), the imagery is brilliantly manipulated and freely makes use of startling Satanic imagery and symbols, overprinted in ingenious graphic design statements.

Mastodon
Leviathan
USA RELAPSE RECORDS RLP 6622 CD (2004)

Sheesh! It's getting dumber all the time. Wouldja believe this is a metal 'concept' LP with lyrics themed on *Moby-Dick*? It's even got tons of expensive looking artwork done by a specially chosen designer (Paul A Romano), resembling scrimshaw work in full colour. Not even Jon Anderson would have dared to try something like this in the 1970s! We're firmly back to the days of prog rock, though in a different way. Pretty good record, although the story-telling aspects of it elude me – it tends to sound much the same all the way through. I gather this record was hyped quite a bit by the record company, who may have put a fair bit of money behind it. Recorded in Seattle in 2004. I was drawn to this one because 'leviathan' is one of my favourite words and I was hoping for a record with a correspondingly 'huge and lumbering' sound, but strangely enough this isn't quite it.

Earth / KK Null
Dexamyl / Andromeda
USA AUTOFACT RECORDS FACT 08 LP

This split LP was originally issued as a 'tour' record which you could only buy if you saw Earth playing live, but now available in the shops to cash in on Earth's reforming and renewed interest in their work, particularly the double LP on Sub Pop now regarded as seminal example of slow riffing and loud volume. Worth picking that up on CD reissue now as it sounds very good! This one is a bit forgettable. It comes in pink vinyl. The Earth side is a 2003 live recording edited by James Plotkin. Yeah, it has its moments of high volume, but is mostly formed from a dull riff that they hammer into the ground in a monotonous way. Then there are boring quiet moments where the band seem to lose their way. I think there's a remix LP for Earth now, same with Isis. Remixing metal music? I don't get it!

Boris
Akuma No Uta
USA SOUTHERN LORD sunn 41 LP (ND)

Picture disc of this 2003 LP by the Jap axe-meisters reissued on Southern Lord. Earlier issues of this on some other label are apparently quite rare and desirable, plus there are variant pressings with slightly different contents. If you like your heavy metal retrograde and reactionary, these Japanese fellows will keep you happier than a squid in the South Seas. This one is better than their damp squib with Merzbow, but still too much of the vocalising and attempts at song structure for this listener; all I want is the feeling of wading through thick concrete. Maybe I need to get 'into' Corrupted and Burmese. Admittedly, some of the material on the A side does get close to delivering just that. Has the 'infamous' Nick Drake pastiche cover.

Lightning Bolt
Ride The Skies
USA LOAD RECORDS LOAD 031 LP (ND)

Just to remind you this pair of Rhode Island gonks are still around. Or are they? It's been a while now since *Wonderful Rainbow*. That was a wonderful record and so is this one. Yet already the recordings are five years old! If you never heard these apes, they do very lively and intensive punky noise using just drum kit, bass guitar and bizarre distorted vocals from the drummer wearing a wresting mask with a mic built in. This one is so irresistibly lovely it's almost a pop LP. Every note is just hammered in to your skull by manic snare drum beats. Actually saw the two Brians who do this live last year in London and they were totally magnificent. Shame it was the exact same evening as Sunn O))). I doubt if I'll ever get another shot at seeing the latter. PS – new LP, *Hypermagic Mountain* (LOAD 078) in the shops now!

Sunn O)))

Thee GrimmRobe demos

USA SOUTHERN LORD sunn37 CD (2005)

Speaking of O'Malley and his crew, here's another piece of product pumped out to keep us happy while they're preparing the new one. If you've heard Sunn O))) you'll know what to expect. This is from their first ever sessions in 1998 where they were still apparently evolving the idea of slow riffs and subsonic bass and excessive amplification. Actually a lot better than the pallid *White1* and *White2* issues. If you like *Flight of the Behemoth*, you'll like this too I would surmise. It's just a shame it doesn't sound very surprising, and the doomy death drones don't really go anywhere – at least not far enough to justify their excessive duration. This is however music you really do have to play very loud indeed. The very clever thing Sunn O))) do is manipulate their imagery and their 'vibe' very carefully, suggesting the music means more than it actually does. The artworks alone for this one (decalcomania method, like Max Ernst, to suggest a forest and a black sun) speak volumes, cementing the notion that these are 'absolutely the rawest and most bleak Sunn O))) recordings available'. The power of suggestion. As ever, issued on vinyl as a double LP in many different formats. I managed to snag one thanks to eBay, but even so it took a lot of work! Also I had no idea there were so many coloured vinyl variants of *White2*. I wish I had just one of them, but I've missed my chance as usual. Often by the time you've heard about these things, they've already sold out! As you've probably guessed, given current cult profile of this combo, all those vinyl artefacts are eBay fodder by now.

Burzum

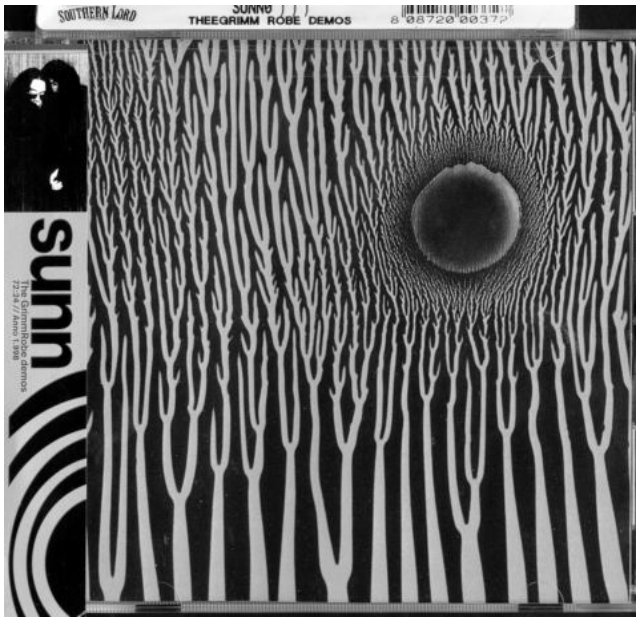
Hvis lyset tar oss

UK BACK ON BLACK BOBV016LP LP (2005)

Burzum

Burzum / Aske

UK BACK ON BLACK BOBV018LP 2 x LP (2005)

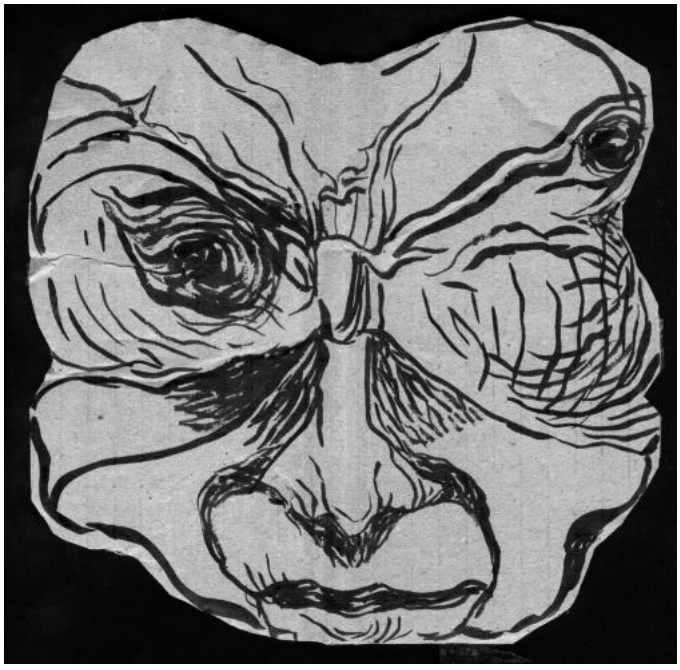


Burzum

Filosofem

UK BACK ON BLACK BOBV019LP 2 x LP (2005)

Finally, just to inform you that these Burzum LPs are all available in the UK on vinyl thanks to this specialist label based in Oxford of all places. I snagged all of these in Selectadisc in Berwick Street. The record clerk was just putting the empty sleeves in the rack; the second she put one in, I yanked it out, and repeated same action as necessary until they threw me out of the shop. The packaging on these devils may be a bit flimsy but here's another chance for late-comers like myself to dive in and find out what all the Burzum fuss is about. Hard to believe some of these records are over ten years old now! I know Jennifer Hor has already covered Burzum very adequately in back issues, but I think *Filosofem* is just magnificent, an extremely convincing combination of overfuzzed guitar buzz with minimal keyboard melodies to create one of the most haunting and harrowing depictions of melancholia and solitude ever released on record. Personally I'll overlook the sensational aspects of the Burzum story and cut straight to the music. In fact I was so convinced I even bought a recent Xasthur release on double vinyl (*Nocturnal Poisoning*, reissued by Southern Lord). Jennifer has reviewed that one too in her section, so I'll shut up now. □

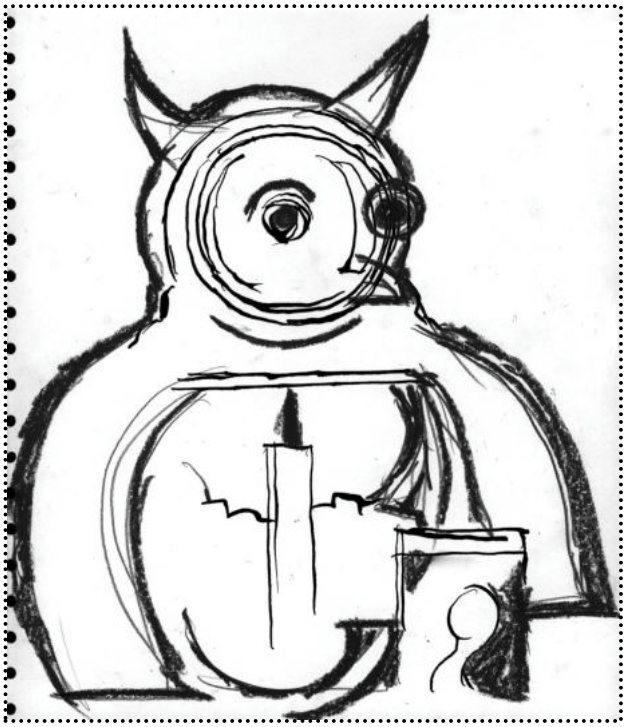


××NIGHTMARES and PENUMBRA××

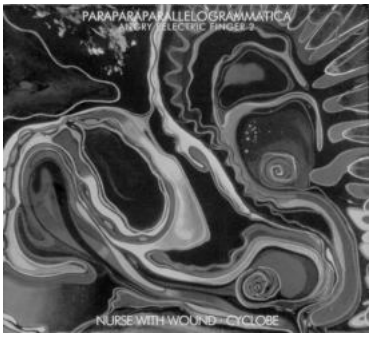
Nurse With Wound / Jim O'Rourke
Tape Monkey Mooch (Angry Eelectric Finger 1)
USA BETA-LACTAM RING RECORDS mt085b CD (2004)

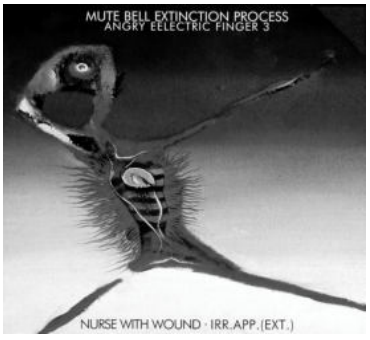
Nurse With Wound / Cyclobe
Paraparaparallelogrammatica (Angry Eelectric Finger 2)
USA BETA-LACTAM RING RECORDS mt086b CD (2004)

Nurse With Wound / Irr.App. (Ext.)
Mute Bell Extinction Process (Angry Eelectric Finger 3)
USA BETA-LACTAM RING RECORDS mt087b CD (2004)



This American label sometimes seem to be striving very hard to be seen as 'weird and far out', to the point where they currently seem to accept any old second-rate drivel offered to them under the aegis of Steven Stapleton's NWW project. The series proposes various remixes and reworkings of recordings by friends and related artists, including the inevitable Jim O'Rourke. Raw material for the series was by Stapleton and Colin Potter, although numerous guest players appear – such as Cliff Stapleton, Thighpaulsandra, David Tibet (supplying 'apocalyptic guitar' sounds) and two veteran Krautrockers, Hansi Fischer and the late Tim Belbe, from the wind section of Xhol Caravan. They supply interesting textures and also remind us of Stapleton's unsurpassed knowledge of rare Kosmische LPs. All packages (smart digipacks) are decorated with big blobby colourful paintings by Stapleton.





Tape Monkey Mooch is the first panel in this musical triptych. It features the guest contributions from Xhol Caravan and David Tibet, and listening to all three discs suggests that they all derive from remixes of the same original NWW/Potter sessions. O'Rourke turns in 2 tracks at about 20 minutes apiece; at first the extreme slowness and ambiguity of this music incurred my impatience, but eventually I found myself admiring it. Mr O'Rourke somehow manages to recreate, on his own terms, the solemn and surreal qualities that are the supposed trademark of Nurse With Wound, and produces quite a worthwhile update on said modes. For the first workout, we hear a slightly doomy and nondescript moaning, as of some hairy backwoods creature proceeding very sluggishly through a miry swamp. An added whirring percussive sound on top equates to the harsh buzzing of arctic mosquitoes. And there are additional subtleties, attributable to O'Rourke's undeniable skills in the studio and mixing suite, with traces of foreign sounds leaking in through deliberately-artificed sound-windows. Ghosts of the sax and flute of Xhol Caravan are here; they're glimpses of sunlight in an otherwise dark dungeon environment.

The second cut is somehow even more ominous, using similar if not identical elements, but reordered to form a different picture and summon different moods. It's more upbeat, slightly; a drumming effect is added, and this time the flute and sax remnants are recut and artfully suspended in a more 'intelligent' mix than the first. Again, it's very much in the spirit of what I take to be the Nurse With Wound commitment to out-there 'oddness' and free-wheeling, primitive approach to studio technique. (Funny how O'Rourke can adapt to this so convincingly, in same way that he notoriously mimicked the methods of Uwe Nettelbeck and Kurt Graupner when working with Faust.) Elements don't quite match, but they mismatch in a very effective way; and it's never overcooked or overstated. It gets even odder as it progresses, and there's evidence of quirky humour despite the ominous feeling. To be used as the soundtrack to a thousand mysterious dreams and nocturnal flights, or just induce a waking state of deep uncertainty.

Paraparaparallelogrammatica is done by Cyclobe, a couple of great UK guys whom we interviewed in issue 10; they have a painstaking approach to studio craft that yields maximum dividends, and they've never yet short-changed their listeners. The appeal of the record for this listener is the very lush, full sound that is one of Cyclobe's trademarks; others may enjoy the perplexing mood-swings, as record lurches from solemn and grim to weirdly humourous, and all points in between. Tracks 1 and 4 simply offer a queasy melange, drifting about rather aimlessly like so much multi-coloured jelly coming to life in the fridge and crawling across your kitchen floor. The third cut includes the puffing work from the

veteran krauts, and they honk their hooters freely over swirling backdrops of mismatched electronica spew. Pretty distinctive work, but somehow very messy. Only the second cut is remotely palatable, with a more restrained and cohesive methodology resulting in a pleasant, slightly somnolent, droning passage. I've tried hard to enjoy this record, but on each listen it comes up too shapeless and random. Maybe I'd do better to just surrender to the flow.

The third and final part of this overblown trilogy rejoices in the title *Mute Bell Extinction Process*. Matt Waldron, who is Irr.App.(Ext.), has also remixed the first Nurse With Wound LP (a cultural event commented on repeatedly by Aaron Robertson last ish); he has also made some reasonable solo records, distinguished by their peculiar sense of the grotesque, the nocturnal and the perverse. Clearly he be an apt choice to climb on board this particular project. As the various elements from the original session – now becoming rather familiar, as this is the third rebake of said session – slowly leak out, the jigsaw puzzle starts to come together. The CD starts off with some vile voices of half-alive monsters, not a million miles away from the sort of Stapleton-treated voices found on *Alice The Goon*. The first track is pretty slow to get started, exhibiting the whirry percussion sound and the rather ordinary crawling drone effects, which may be intended to have some 'sinister' undercurrents. Eventually it improves, settling into a groove that creates an atmospheric 'mooder' of no small mien. As noted, it's all suggestive of unholy monsters, freaks and bizarre underground creatures plucked from the imagination of Clive Barker…perhaps a portrait of one large monster and lots of little creatures surrounding him.

The second cut is much more striking. It showcases some deliciously obnoxious recordings of what might be guitar strings, loosely attached to some completely fucked-up old instrument…the varispeed device goes into overdrive, increasing sense of abnormality and bringing nausea. Further voices of the horrific and nameless homunculi are brought in. This one is a real indigestion nightmare, worthy of Windsor McCay's Rarebit Fiend and his cheese-induced visions. A vile witches' brew of a mix indicating that this CD is, in a way, the 'boldest' of the three remix projects; Waldron is unafraid of taking risks, and manages to push things just that stage too far, even at the expense of upsetting the listener and transgressing notions of good taste – which is how artists should behave. The third index point grows out of the previous one…the whole CD may be a continuous lurch from one ghastly situation to the next. Breathing effects, doomy drums and percussion, traces of the original sax and flute session. These are so reprocessed and attenuated to have the effect of rendering the original Krautrock players as ghosts, ghosts of their former selves and ghosts of the past. In fact, one of them already is a ghost, playing at the great Kosmische party in the sky.

ED PINSENT 11/07/2005, 21/07/2005, 01/08/2005
www.blrrecords.com

Chuck Bettis

Sonic Sigils

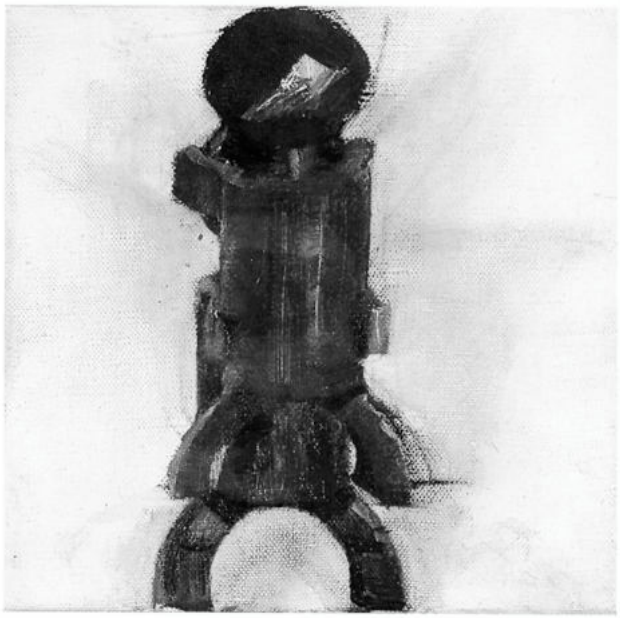
USA SCARCELIGHT RECORDINGS SLR22 3" CD (2004)

A powerful miniature beast, one to be used with caution…it looks great even before you slip it into the CD player, a mini-CD pressed into full-size carrier and decorated with drawings of three owls, and the curlicue lettering arranged in mystical patterns. 'Menacing magick at work', comes the warning. You can almost believe it too, when you hear the chattering and uglified electronic gibberish pouring out of your speakers like so much ectoplasm from the mouth of a spiritualist. A sonic machine gun spits out short bursts of rapid-fire attacks, leaving you defenceless, even if the onslaught gradually becomes less alarming towards the end.

Bettis is from Washington, now resident in NYC. Not fully clear how he arrived at the sounds that are on the finished product; more relevant is his inspiration, which came from a method used by psychologists to calm down an angry person. What you have to do is copy the breathing pattern of said angry man, which is presumably pretty agitated, then start to slow down your breathing so that the irate red-faced person will slow down in time with you. Simple psychology…or sympathetic magick? I'm sure that Bettis has used this technique to save his hide many a time, especially when faced with hot-tempered hoodlums menacing him on the subway. Calling himself a 'sound scientist', he's been working at his mystery since 1995, now using computers and digital manipulation to do it.

May be worth slipping this into your iPod or Discman and taking it out on public transport, just to see the effect; may function as a charm against your enemies, or a good luck talisman for yourself. For the meaning of a sigil, read the works of Austin Osman Spare; I always think of a train being the best place for operating a sigil, based on 'Casting The Runes' by M R James. And for the meaning of owls as occult symbols of dark forces, read *The Owl Service* by Alan Garner, or just fear owls generally. Especially if you're a mouse and you live in a barn.

ED PINSENT 17/07/2005
http://scarcelight.org



Das Synthetische Mischgewebe

Casual Praise of Domestic Calamities

UK HYPNAGOGIA GIA02 CD (2004)

A substantial recent work from this veteran of the early 1980s industrial/electronics scene, who started off releasing cassettes in Berlin around that time. Guido Huebner realised these 10 works over 1999-2004 in France and Germany, and here they are in a striking package on Paul Anomali's Hypnagogia label. These musical assaults are quietly devastating, exceedingly subtle in their efforts to disturb and undermine

normality. At first listen, you may suppose you're dealing with nothing more than any other 'normal' slice of dribbling electronica, but after several minutes of immersion, you ears start to tell you something's wrong. The music can eat into your psyche like acid. Nothing overtly noisy or aggressive here; just a sinister quietness, seeping into your bloodstream like a slow-acting toxin.

The title alone should clue you in to Huebner's agenda; he's taking a deliberately detached stance from commonplace horrors. Domesticity and family life might be under attack; there are four tiny images on the cover, which show a couple rendered as plastic Lego figures. In three of the poses, they're probably copulating; in one image, they're fighting. (Actually these refer to other projects in the series, but the point is still valid). These images, of which there's a large acrylic painting version on the front cover, are credited to Françoise Vigot. Add to this the so-called 'track titles', which are in fact lengthy pieces of scrambled prose full of broken images hinting at grotesqueries and blasphemies of all stripes, and you have a fine package of subversive mayhem in your mitts.

Musically, the collection also works – it's a very strong example of well-wrought modern electro-acoustic composition. Filled with tension and very striking clashes of textures; occasionally gets a little digital agitation going, like stirring up an electronic hornet's nest. Not pleasant. Evil metallic clicks and whirrs fill the air, suggestive of the human body's 'clock' being taken to pieces, cog by cog, and rebuilt in the wrong order to transform the human frame into a clockwork bogey-man. Huebner is a nasty piece of work, an evil scientist rewiring the bodies and souls of many innocent bystanders. This CD is the first in a series of four DSM projects in the hypnagOgia release programme; collaborations are forthcoming, including one with The New Blockaders scheduled for Autumn 2005.

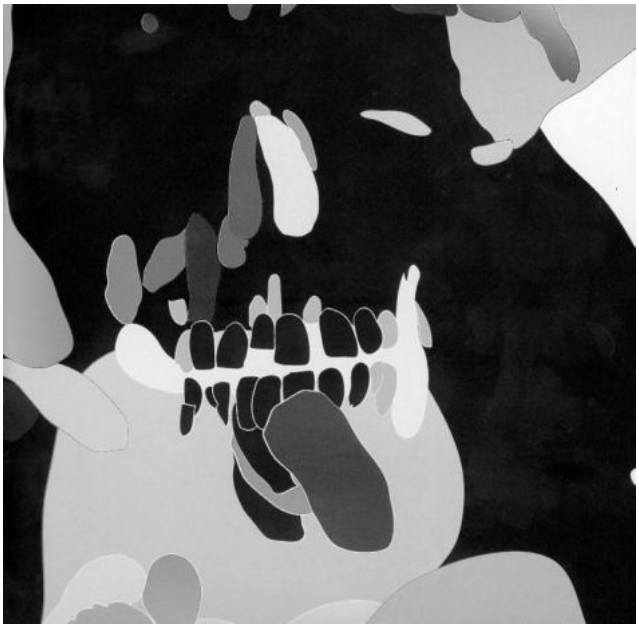
ED PINSENT 12/07/2005
www.hypnagogia.co.uk

Z'ev

Headphone Musics, 1 to 6
UK TOUCH TO:63 CD (2004)

This one followed quite swiftly on from his 2004 collaboration with Organum on same label, which was, frankly, a pretty humdrum collection of nondescript noises. Although generally known as an avant-percussion stylist, banging large bits of metal with reckless abandon, American muso Z'ev is also a pretty mean contender when he gets behind the editing suite, and *Headphone Musics* for the most part resides in that area – heavily processed and multi-layered tape-edit constructs. One to file alongside his 2001 release, *Face The Wound*, although that CD was slightly edgier, more paranoid, and certainly pushed its voice samples to the fore, arrayed in not-so-subtle ironic juxtapositions designed to maximise shock effect and sap listener's sense of well-being.

Here Z'ev achieves not dissimilar effect, although it took until I reached



tracks 3-4 before any underlying pattern to the six main 'Heaphone' works could be perceived. His method involves mixing together ambient musics and sound-scapes with sound-effects and treated voice samples, to form open-ended statements of a calculated ambiguity. On the third piece, it works very successfully; it's hard to figure out what is happening in among the vague moans and rattling, the weird droning and the occasional almost-identifiable voices and other field recordings. Put simply, it's nightmarish. The fourth piece starts with something like a portrait of a huge prison cell, distant steel doors slamming and sealing us in for the night. Here, the use of foreign elements is more like sound effects – it can be dramatic, but it comes close to being corny, like a Hollywood soundtrack approach. I could say the same about the second cut, which sounds vaguely like a Spielberg animatronics dinosaur roaring, in among the more 'avant' styled filter-and-processing treatments.

After the six 'Headphone' works, we have 'As Is As' from 1976, which if nothing else reminds you of Z'ev's longevity and respectable pedigree in the field. What also stands out is how raw and alive it sounds compared with the preceding cuts. Perhaps this is simply because it's completely analogue – a relic from a more innocent age before computers were so widely used in realising electronic music; 'As Is As' crackles with fizzy electronics, and makes your flesh crawl sideways with its sinister creepy voices. If you like it raw and unprocessed, this is the goods. Even if it still has that Hollywood feeling to it, it's the dark Hollywood that brought us Orson Welles in *Touch Of Evil*.

The title of this release refers to its creator's insistence on the use of headphones for listening to it. A printed note in CD firmly makes it clear that reviewers should not even bother to write about said record (or even have an opinion?) unless they hear it through headphones. I can understand any musician's sense of exasperation with music writers, who are quite often ill-informed, lazy, unmusical, and not really entitled to pass comment on things they don't understand – myself included. Even DJs who might play it on the radio are instructed to 'advise your public of the proper listening procedure to ensure integrity'. Is Z'ev a control freak? This is on a par with López insisting that his audience wear blindfolds. It's one thing to strive for optimum conditions for appreciation of one's music, but quite another to direct your audience around like lab rats running through a maze! Well, as for this particular rat, I did follow said instruction using my Sennheisers, but since playback through my Rogers speakers is not encouraged, I've nothing to compare it to.

ED PINSENT 16/07/2005
www.touchmusic.org.uk

Andreas Meland / Lasse Marhaug

Brakhage
MELEKTRONIKK MELK 012 CD (2005)

Now here's a fine and unusual record. It's another Brakhage-themed CD, after last year's well-celebrated Text Of Light of course, which

garnered much comment due to its Sonic Youth and NYC school connections one suspects, although the music was great also. From these two Nordic electronic geniuses now comes a completely different approach to same subject. For his part, Meland 'does' the famous *Dog Star Man*, which you might be forgiven for thinking was the only film Stan Brakhage ever made (he made dozens of others, but for some reason this has become the famous one). Meland's musical offering was rendered with guitars, organ, violin and piano, with guests on live electronics and 'kitchen' (?). His work seems to convey not so much the coarse, rough edges of the Brakhage approach to film-making, but comprises mostly some rather pleasant electronic assemblages that speak of the beauty of the snow and the sunshine that feature so prominently in this most famous film. The layers of interlaced drones criss-cross and turn back and forth within a fairly narrow sonic register.

Meland's work (and indeed Marhaug's also) was recorded live for a 16mm screening of the *Prelude to Dog Star Man* movie, which took place in Oslo in 2003. To his credit, we should report that (1) Meland himself organised the screenings in his own little cinema, along with Lasse Marhaug's help. No mean feat in a day and age when it's increasingly impossible to find any screenings, public or private, of experimental cinema. Don't get me started on this one...(2) Meland

understands fully that the film was created without a soundtrack, it does not require a soundtrack, and he considers his music merely as music inspired by it. (3) He allowed the 'free-associative' and restless nature of Brakhage's free-wheeling approach to shooting and editing celluloid to inspire his improvisations – in particular, the use of superimposed images. (4) He has actually *watched the films*. I say this as it's so easy to take something so obvious for granted! Full marks for sensitivity and thoroughness, although this music is a tad too 'tasteful' for repeated listening in this house and for same reason it might have incurred a scowl from the master Brakhage himself, known for his wild ideas, his untamed lifestyle, and deep suspicion of cosy bourgeois tastes.

Lasse Marhaug also did his music live, at same screening event, for the notorious autopsy movie *The Act Of Seeing With One's Eyes*, a filmic experience which I have yet to endure. Lasse uses samples from his own music and from guest players, and he gives us what appears to be 32 minutes of menacing, sinister noises; but there's a lot more depth to it. His work is based on a very close, intelligent and simpatico reading of the film, as you'd expect from someone as 'keyed in' to the richness of life's experiences as Marhaug. He users layers and layers of looped materials, to form gradual accretions of sound, stepping up the ante in the same way the film does, as Brakhage carefully tries to accustom you to the extreme imagery. Marhaug conveys alien beauty, a steady and intense atmosphere. Not so much dark and 'gothick', as an exploration in sound, filled with curiosity and wonder. There's a slightly grungy quality to the sound surface, which is also totally apt. Structure, not content, is the main basis for this improvisation, and it's a major success on all levels. The Michelin Man scores again!

ED PINSENT 30/07/2005
www.melektronikk.com

The New Blockaders with The Haters

Zero Is The Journey

USA PSYCHFORM RECORDS PFR 03 CD (2004)

Zero is the Journey, indeed…this release is being promoted as a rare meeting between two of the most nihilistic misanthropes in today's underground 'scene', a possibility which I can readily believe. If the two of them ever got together with Jim Thirlwell and Michael Gira, then watch out world…the sun itself would probably snuff out. The Haters is actually one guy, with the amazing name of G X Jupitter-Larsen, while The New Blockaders is Richard Rupenus; both these guys have now served upwards of 20 years in the 'slammer', that is to say the dead-end ghetto that represents underground noise-music. Indeed this record could almost be heard as approximating the experience of serving time in the 'hoosegow', the inmates mouldering in death row as they watch the lights dimming once again and grimly acknowledge that another guy is 'frying' in the 'chair'.

Actually, far from wishing to escape from their confines, these two 'old lags' are busily convincing themselves (and anyone else who'll listen) that life on the outside is completely worthless anyway. This record is a vortex of despair, sucking you in slowly. It isn't a record of loud noise; all the same, it starts off very unpleasant, and steadily gets worse. One ghastly high-pitched whine will be the portion of all those who purchase this disc, accentuated with a metallic buzzing sound (not unlike a huge flying beetle) wafting back and forth across the sound stage. Listening to this is bound to make you feel tense and edgy in no time at all, as is undoubtedly intended. Believe me, clinically-depressed mental cases just want to drag you down to their level, and pull you into their orbit to share their pain. These two ghouls, forever condemned into self-appointed solitary confinement, appear to follow a similar pattern!

The full-colour booklet provided has a seductive shine and sheen, but that's deceptive. To read it is to peruse a document of psychosis, one step away from a serial killer's notebook. A recognisable 'figure', rendered by computer graphics, haunts every page; on each appearance, he's become progressively more distorted and twisted, and generally worse off then when he began. Growing into a strange pointy triangular thing, eventually all of his human elements drop away and his physical corporeality seems to fold away into another dimension. All the while, he's surrounded by crazed lettering that would send you insane if you tried to read it. The misfortunes of this poor fellow, clearly suffering what Shakespeare called 'the cruel buffets of life', should serve to illustrate the subtext of this record.

The first part of the musical work continues to deliver the deathly whine for about 9 minutes, keeping you in a state of tense expectation as if awaiting your own execution, until about 45 seconds later when it suddenly gets really nasty. A crackling, grinding rumble of doom comes in…a dull murmur pitched against vile whines…more layers of filth and sewage are added. The worse place on earth just got ten times worse. Thank goodness it all fades away eventually, but mere silence cannot dispel the sickening feeling that's already settling into your bones. Besides, here comes part two…although this is one is still quite some way from the massive mortar-barrage assault of normal TNB records, it's still pretty brutalising. Humming and banging reverberations are filled with menace, and sufficiently intense to leave a taste of bitter aloes in the mouth of all who sup at this refectory. Yes, if life is a journey, then our two friends here are telling us that it's completely worthless, and probably long and painful to boot. Monotonous, dreary noise; tune in now and drink your fill until you're sick of it.

ED PINSENT 18/07/2005
www.psychform.com

Asmus Tietchens

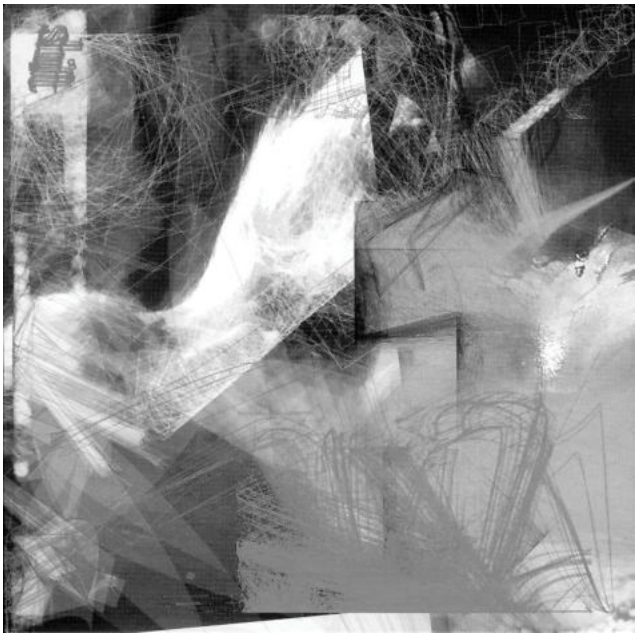
Eine Ganze Menge

GERMANY 1000FUSSLER 004 3" CD (2005)

Here's a mini-CD from this bloodless German electro-underground veteran. All recorded in a studio in Hamburg, with three tracks, all numbered variants on 'teilmenge', one of them using and reworking a piece by the programming expert Malte Steiner. There have been four CDs in this teilmengen series already, all of them based on nothing more than sinewaves and white noise.

Although silent and low-key for the most part, this works hits home with fatal and heavy accuracy, and is ultimately rather brutalising. Perhaps Tietchens sees himself as a species of sonic factory worker, creating machine-tooled pieces for listener to use and re-engineer and refit the brain. Unfortunately, this experiment failed with me. I just can't connect with the vague, mysterious and uneventful drifting on offer here, which seems too clinical, low-key, and deliberately alienating. Latter effect is probably intended by composer, who seems pretty a stern fellow and tends to deal in 'absolutes'. This would make good soundtrack for an autopsy. The trouble is, you are the cadaver on the slab and Tietchens is the mortician!

ED PINSENT 16/07/2005
www.tausend-fuessler.de



Shift

Have No Fury / Jag Var I Kulverten
HEIDENLÄRM SOUNDS hedlam 01 7" SINGLE (2004)

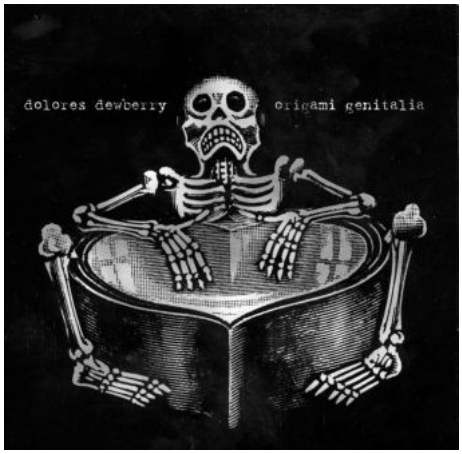
Nice little 45 here, though I think it's all the product I'll ever require from this depressing combo who definitely have a very retrograde 80s industrial power-noise vibe. Exhibit A: in August 2005, they shared a bill with Grey Wolves and Con-Dom, two currently operating diehard power-noise bands who have very high opinions of their extremely reactionary work. This record is OK. A side has a gloomy, depressing feeling, with its dreary percussion, distorted piano and possible use of tape manipulation; it clanks and cloinks along in ungainly fashion, exhibiting some interesting subtleties. The B side uses the echoed voice of a groaning monster lured out of his lair by tape loops and studio effects; this one is even more bleak and empty, a fine example of slow and subtle horrifying noise, as opposed to shrill and harsh noise. A lot of care was put into the package of this one, although I think said effort may be due to Mr Heidenlarm rather than the mystery men who comprise Shift…it's pressed in heavy clear vinyl, and housed in a luxury art sleeve designed by Stephen O'Malley using tons of overprinting effects – even the inside of the sleeve is printed. Those of you who are Sunn O))) completists may wish to scoop one up.

ED PINSENT 10/09/2005
www.heidenlarm.com

Dolores Dewberry / Origami Genitalia

Dolores Dewberry / Origami Genitalia
USA APOP RECORDS APOP 001 / CARBON RECORDS CR109 / GOLD SOUNDZ GS#36 / LITTLE MAFIA LM043 / NIHILIST NIHIL 26 / SUNSHIP RECORDS SUN53 CD (2005)

Pretty good, although very retrograde, CD of unreconstructed nasty and weird noise. It might be a split CD, unless everything we hear is being done by Eric Hofferber and E W Hagstrom; I'm somewhat confused by the sleeve credit. The first three cuts are credited to Dolores Dewberry, and there's a video component on the disc in her name too. Her work has a sordid sex and drugs undercurrent, aiming to convey sleaze and shock. Yawn! Her first number is competent enough electronic noise, but it is carefully controlled while aiming to be as 'extreme' as possible without actually splitting the eardrums of the audience. A wild, shrieking Theremin-like instrument howls loudly above a pulsing feedback rhythm; it's a tune about 'fucking'. Her second piece uses the hoary old cliché of sex movie samples, and a pretty dull disco tune as backing – I don't care if she feeds it through a thick wall of fuzz, it's still totally trite! But things do improve...after a while the voices become so preposterous, you just have to laugh! So it's funny in a way. It conveys something about the absurdity of the sex act by juxtaposing these ridiculous voices with an alarming electronic shriek. Actually it may be a bachelor-party sex LP rather than a porn movie soundtrack, but you get the idea. After this, she does another gothic buzzy drone thing with more eerie wails and scuzzed-up noise additives. This is intended to portray a cocaine rush, and accordingly gets more intense as it goes on...



Origami Genitalia are we presume nothing to do with the mysterious Norwegian collective featuring Tore Honore Böe. Indeed this choice of alias may be a satirical dig at that style of wispy droning music, which they presumably despise. Hagstrom, if indeed he is associated with this, is I gather quite renowned in industrial / noise circles. The ten tracks credited to this combo are short instrumentals, taking things like mud, drugs, victims, frustration, pigs as subject matter...accordingly their music is churning, flailing, poisonous stuff, stuck in neutral, and pulled from the innards of men who like to wallow in frustration, yet have learned to live with the futility of everything. Much more dark and abstract than the Dolores Dewberry cuts, which are already starting to seem like Little Red Riding Hood in comparison. Strange formless groaning noise, howls, and odd grinding percussion loops, all calculated to leave you no peace, by night or by day. Just plain weird! Despite all this alienating miasma laid on like thick meat paste, the music itself doesn't seem overly processed – which may be a good thing. And despite their genital-fixated name, they're not actually so strong as Dolores on serving up the sleazy sexual subtexts, unless you count a song like 'Folk Music of the Penis'; but even this seems little more than a dark masturbatory fantasy. The same can be said of many of these tautly-constructed miniatures, particularly the few short 90-second cuts. They do longer tracks too, but you can't beat the 90-second episodes; listening to this direness for any longer tends to induce nausea and vomiting!

The front cover to this mess has a pretty good skeleton woodcut in black field. The inside features blurry photographs of boxes marked 'nipples' and 'gas cocks', which are probably quite innocent components when employed by any qualified plumber or heating engineer, but no doubt our two friends are sniggering to themselves just like Beavis and Butthead. There's some decent noises on here, not too loud or too extreme, but overall this is nowhere near as 'shocking' or 'transgressive' as its perpetrators would like to think.

ED PINSENT 30/07/2005
www.apoprecords.com
www.carbonrecords.com
www.tibprod.com/goldsoundz.htm
www.littlemafia.com
www.nihilistrecords.com
www.freenoise.org/sun

PANDÆMONIUM!

JENNIFER HOR BRINGS FORTH A BLACK METAL BONANZA BELCHED FROM THE BOILING BOWELS OF BELIAL'S BELLY!

Thorr's Hammer
Dommedagsnatt
USA SOUTHERN LORD SUNN1
CD (1998?)

Grimmly recorded indeed was this album by US cult death / doom band Thorr's Hammer (not to be confused with the Polish one-man black metal affair Thor's Hammer which ended 2003) way back in 1995; maybe the weather in that year was unseasonably icy cold (June, 1995 - icy cold then?) or unseasonably warm in northwest Washington state. Thorr's Hammer was possibly the first band where the modern-day Grimm Brothers Greg Anderson and Stephen O'Malley began playing together and even in those days they were serious students of subsonik speleology: their twin guitar excavation churns through tunnels and tunnels of thick granite and basalt, accreting a thick sludgy layer of crust and scree on their instruments and amplifiers while the rhythm section of Jamie Sykes and James Hale supplies the jackhammer energy to power mining operations. Solid earthy riffing is emphasised throughout the recording to the point where in the middle two tracks it's a little monotonous and things start to look textbook-technical.

The main wonder of the band is the seventeen year old (in 1995) vocalist Runhild Gammalsaeter whose ice-blonde angel temptress looks belie her unearthly death metal throat shredding talents which add an extra thick layer of crust to the Grimmguitarists' lithospheric creations. Towards the end of the title piece Gammalsaeter's rumbling appears a little strained especially as at this point she has only percussion accompanying her and that's when you can tell it really is a girl doing all that deep groaning. Gammalsaeter sings in Norwegian (she wrote the lyrics as well) and unfortunately there is no English translation to accompany the printed lyrics but they appear to refer to Germanic mythology and Gammalsaeter's love for Norway and its landscapes.

The highlight of the recording is the live piece 'Mellom Galgene' in which the band trudges through slag heaps of thick guitar sludge over and over until the eighth minute when the hypnotic trance induced by the droning build-up overcomes everyone and all enter a tribal dance with the rhythm section maintaining a vigorous throb. The whole piece is artfully constructed: before the climax, the music teasingly slows right down and drags out the, ah, plateau phase, becoming ever more earth-encrusted, and right before the trance begins it is really crawling. The denouement might be expected to go a bit sloppy but everyone turns out tight and disciplined to the very end.

Thorr's Hammer disbanded after a short existence when Gammalsaeter returned to Norway and some of the musicians left stranded then went on to form Burning Witch. Anderson left this band to form Goatsnake (still a working entity) and appears not to have come in contact with O'Malley again until 1998, the same year they formed SunnO))). Recommended to SunnO))) and all doom metal fans just for that thick and grimy guitar sound (and more) - O'Malley could surely move whole mountain ranges with that sound.

JENNIFER HOR 04/04/2005
www.southernlord.com

Velvet Cacoon
Genevieve
USA FULL MOON PRODUCTIONS FMP036
CD (2004?)

On paper this band from Oregon looks good: a girl / boy black metal duo with the girl, known only as LVG, handling the hissing reptilian vocals and playing a custom-made guitar with a diesel tank inside that emits fuel for the fire which in turn helps to generate the guitar sounds. The boy SGL provides vision and direction, and I assume operates the drum machines and rhythms. Apparently he spent the early part of 2005 in an asylum which as TSP readers should all know by now qualifies him for a spot on the TSP music review panel (come on down, SGL!), if and when such a vacancy appears. I imagine when VC play live their gigs must be a pyrotechnic spectacle to behold though any organisers would do well to check the fire safety regulations in the venues first. Then there's the fact that the VC crew belong to an ecoterrorist organisation called the Earth Liberation Front which sure would not endear them to the police, the FBI and the US Department of Homeland Security and which would explain why the band members' faces are shadowed in the CD sleeve photos (so no-one can identify them and report them to the authorities) - hmmm.

Unfortunately on this, the band's first 'proper' release (previous recordings having been traded among friends and others who knew the band and on underground networks), the dieselharp guitar turns out to be mostly fuzzy and buzzy with any fire noises seemingly edited out. The rhythms sound a bit under-powered and leaden and LVG's vocals tend either to get submerged and lost in the droning buzz or to sound too low-key and whispery. I hope and hope and hope that somewhere she'll start screaming and turn into a voracious vampire or a demented sea serpent but no, her style overall turns out to be subdued and rather tasteful for this kind of music. Certainly the musicians generate a lot of aggression and passion in the music and I can see VC carving out a unique niche in black metal drone and while I agree the music should do the talking with a minimum of frills, on this occasion with the tracks structured somewhat like songs (but with few lyrics) I think some pieces, not all, could have done with an all-out cathartic explosion: guitars detonating (sonically of course, not literally!), drum machines going out of control and LVG shouting or screaming or at least throwing a hissy fit - all this could have lifted *Genevieve* to another level.

The last track 'Bete Noir' is a 17-minute dark ambient work-out with very low-pitched drones and floaty effects; while it's creepy and very ghostly, I do think LVG's vocals could have been of use here, treated with lots of reverb and distortion at various points in the track to create even more of an impression of an underwater leviathan.

Overall not a bad album but a little too well-behaved considering what I believe the band is capable of: VC have a good sound and could do a great deal with that metal drone. I find the vocals rather restricted (the underwater-based theme of the album might have had something to do with this) and would have preferred them to be more prominent in the mix. At this point in their career, VC have the potential to travel in a more Gothic / Romantic / dark ambient direction or on a more droney sound architecture BM path or some combination of the two - if the Feds don't get them first!

JENNIFER HOR 09/06/2005
www.fmp666.com
general@fmp666.com

(NB I was under the impression that the Number of the Beast had changed to 616)

Xasthur

Nocturnal Poisoning

USA BLOOD FIRE DEATH / REDSTREAM BFD008 CD (2001?)

Since Varg Vikernes was imprisoned for murder in Norway in 1996 and so could operate his Burzum project only sparingly until he terminated it in 2000, many pretenders to his one-man-against-the-world black metal throne have arisen and of these, the California-based project Xasthur, masterminded by Malefic (Scott Conner to his family), made a strong claim to it with this album some years ago. Strong riffing, varied pacing and a production that cuts a fine balance between rawness and a crisp delivery are the distinct features of *Nocturnal Poisoning*, regarded by some as Xasthur's masterpiece: the guitars in particular often have very clear tones but retain the jagged chainsaw edge necessary in this kind of music. The vocals tend to be buried quite deeply in the mix and there is no lyric sheet for listeners to follow (not that Xasthur's music lends itself to clap-happy communal singalongs around campfires) so one has to rely on the track titles to find out what preoccupies Mr Conner when in Malefic mode and not surprisingly the subjects are usually pessimistic and verging on the depressed and the near-suicidal.

One highlight of this album is the all-instrumental rendition of French BM band Mütiilation's 'Black Imperial Blood' which in some ways improves upon the original: Xasthur's cover adds power and, perhaps unusually for this kind of music, a spacious quality achieved with echo effects which compensate for the lesser speed and aggression than the original with its hive-of-hornets guitars. The momentum is maintained with 'Legion of Sin and Necromancy' where buzzy chainsaw guitars and pure synth tones join in a thrash tapestry of contrasting textures with Malefic's screams drowning in layers of distortion. I do find though that throughout this recording there are moments where Malefic relies a little too hard on the Burzum formula but appears not to grasp fully the essential idea of creating a trance-like state via repetition or atmosphere (and Burzum itself did not always succeed with this minimalist idea) and so much of the time the music is merely repetitive or has to fall back on conventional modes of music to keep going. The drumming is fairly pedestrian and in some of the later tracks it's really plodding.

This recording cuts a midpoint between BM and a more melodic and transparent style of rock and so serves as a handy introduction to BM. I've not heard much American BM but have the impression after hearing Xasthur, Leviathan and the cartoony I.C.E. that this music is interpreting BM for audiences raised on conventional hard rock / heavy metal who can't or won't accept BM on its own terms. I accept that to some extent American BM artists must 'dumb down' the music for their audiences and also for their own survival but doing this compromises the music and the artists themselves so I have an ambivalent attitude towards the CD under review. I do believe audiences in the US and other English-speaking countries must meet BM and other outsider music genres on the music's terms but in the current cultural / political climate, it's wishful thinking, I know ...

JENNIFER HOR 06/04/2005
Blood, Fire, Death / Red Stream:
www.redstream.org
Scott ... uh, Malefic / Xasthur
xasthur@hotmail.com

Blut Aus Nord

The mystical beast of rebellion

FRANCE OAKEN SHIELD / ADIPOCERE RECORDS FPG6 CD (2001)

Here is a good album of mostly instrumental riff-based black metal minimalism / drone distinguished by unusual guitar chord progressions that rise and sink precipitously throughout. True, on the whole the album is repetitive and monotonous with unvarying percussion on most tracks; half the guitars go up and down like strong undulating waves at sea during a heavy storm and the other half keep up a deep buzzing drone. There are six 'chapters' of 'The Fall' (one presumes the mystical beast of rebellion in question is none other than Satan Himself - unless TSP readers know of any other fallen angels) which are fairly similar in speed and aggression and all linked by passages of subsonic throbbing hum or murky ambience. Constant changes of key and the seesawing guitar passages give the music a lot of drama and a certain sinister majesty befitting a fallen angel; the pace and fury prevent any theatricality or pretension from creeping in. What singing exists is usually very brief in each track and also very screechy and sounds quite distant as though the vokillist were in danger of being swept away and drowned in the maelstrom of guitar noise. Come chapter 5 and the music slows down somewhat with a bit of melody and demonic voices muttering in the background; the riffing becomes very drawn out and droney, still in the nauseating seesawing way - all meant to be very disorienting, which it is at times. A lone distant drone can be heard in the background, otherwise buzzing riffs dominate the piece. With chapter 6, the music picks up speed and fresh anger, the

singing sounds defiant at times and the whole recording concludes with a series of mind-bending (and vomit-inducing) droning riffs - I find this section the best part of the whole album - and a dramatic and abrupt cymbal flourish.

The recording is just over 40 minutes in length; one needs to hear it in its entirety in one sitting to appreciate the depth and drama achieved. The atmospheric interludes between tracks are important to the concept. Overall, the music acquires a substance and majesty quite remarkable for such a raw style and with fairly basic production, with just a few special effects here and there; individual tracks could have been more varied (the last two tracks exhibit more variety and are more interesting than the previous four in this respect) but adding variety for its own sake might have weakened the overall unity and thrust of the record and introduced a pretentious element so I won't quibble here. My major gripe here is that the lyrics are not printed in the CD sleeve, not that I'd want to sing along with my silly mewling squeak, you understand - it just would have been nice to see the lyrics to get a better understanding of the concept, if any, behind the recording.

With such a stern and unforgiving name, Blut Aus Nord might easily be mistaken for a German or Austrian band but these guys are actually French. Believe me, I have scrolled up and down the list of over 1,400 French heavy metal bands (yep, over 1,400!) on Encyclopedia Metallum and found plenty of bands with English, German, Latin and sometimes even Scandinavian-looking names but could only find two groups with French-looking names - don't ask me why that is so.

JENNIFER HOR 08/07/2005
www.adipocere.fr
adipocere@wanadoo.fr

Judas Iscariot
Heaven in Flames
USA RED STREAM RECORDS RSR-0136 CD (1999)

Judas Iscariot
To Embrace the Corpses Bleeding
USA RED STREAM RECORDS RSR-0158 CD (2002)

After hearing *Heaven in Flames* a few times, I find this album achieves what I consider a good balance between the essential raw, primitive and punishing black metal minimalism of fast if tinny beats and ongoing guitar blizzard grind on the one hand and slightly more melodic elements with touches of keyboard work on the other hand; regular folks may think the CD is pretty much all raw primitive black metal in the vein of classic Norwegian bands like Darkthrone and Burzum. On nearly all tracks Akhenaten aka Andrew Harris, the sole member of the band, adopts a mostly understated declamatory vokillz style, speaking rather than screaming; with the music roaring in the background, the overall effect is that of some black metal poet-

philosopher meditating on the destruction of institutional religion and the apocalyptic visions he has, particularly on a track like 'Gaze Upon Heaven in Flames' where pummelling percussion and rushing guitars and keyboards add urgency and force to the lyrics. Initially the songs can sound much the same but after a few spins they reveal their distinctiveness (the relatively sedate and loping pace of 'Eternal Bliss ... Eternal Death' can remind one of Graveland) and some melodies and riffs will find a more or less permanent home in your brain. Akhenaten's vokill technique and the straightforward approach of this album where melodies, riffs and lead guitar flourishes appear mainly for brief dramatic effect or to emphasise and / or contrast with the black metal roar make this album a highly worthy one in the BM canon.

Judas Iscariot released about six full-length studio albums, a live album and several other recordings over a period spanning a decade (1992 - 2002) before Akhenaten ended the project in 2002 and *To Embrace the Corpses Bleeding* is the last full-length studio album (*Heaven ...* is the 5th such recording). Dedicated to the victims of the St Bartholomew's Eve massacre in Romania in 1460 (I have worked out it took place during the reign of Vlad Tepes in Wallachia and indeed Akhenaten says in the CD sleeve notes that the massacre took place under the order of the 'Dragon Prince' which would tally with Vlad Tepes; the Impaler's family name was Dracul which means 'the dragon' in Romanian and the family crest included a picture of a dragon with a tail in its mouth which I believe also featured on the family crest of the Bathory family in Hungary!), this CD has more atmospheric sound effects and is more aggressive yet I find it a (slightly) lesser work than its predecessor. Perhaps this may be because by 2001 during the recording of the album, Akhenaten had become as much fed up with the black metal scene, with its faddishness and factionalism, as he was with the world and humanity generally. Certainly the CD is furious with much screaming and the attitude is all attack-dog menace so the earlier balance of *Heaven ...* is lost and the music overall is somewhat less distinctive though it improves with later songs (around tracks 6 - 9). As swansongs go, it's best to go out with a bang, even a bitter-tasting one at that where Judas Iscariot is concerned, and the band certainly does that with plenty of bile to spare.

Definitely I would recommend *Heaven in Flames* as a BM must-have; at the moment I'm not too sure about *To Embrace the Corpses Bleeding* but perhaps after a few more spins it'll grow on me and then I shall find it hard to part with it. These albums together are proof of the early flowering of United States black metal (USBM) and show that though the Americans might have been a bit slow to catch on to the music, they began producing quality product early on; though Judas Iscariot spent the latter part of its career based in Germany, Akhenaten always regarded the project as American, not because of any 'patriotism', but because the dire experiences he had growing up in the States influenced the direction and outlook of the band.

JENNIFER HOR 12/10/2005
www.redstream.org
redstream@aol.com

Taake
Nattestid Ser Porten Vid
ITALY WOUNDED LOVE RECORDS WLR013 CD (1999)

You know you've come across a record meant for only a small and select audience when just about all the really important information you need to understand and appreciate the music fully is not only written in Norwegian but also written in the Runic script once used for writing Old Norse.That should give you some idea of Taake's determination to hoe their own furrow in the already diverse black metal landscape. Certainly the music makes no concessions for the faint of heart: the entire recording consists of a single epic broken up into seven parts all sounding fairly similar and, apart from tracks 1 and 7, not boasting any really distinctive melodies; in addition, *Nattestid ...* is the first album in a trilogy of similar epics that was completed in 2005 so if you're a really keen bean with pockets full of gold and silver beans ... The direction is towards the heroic and male choirs feature on tracks 1 and 7, giving this recording a masculine but not overtly macho quality. In lesser hands and with a different style of music, the album's concept would have been cartoony and laughably camp; instead Taake's commitment to the original black metal lo-fi / minimalist aesthetic makes *Nattestid ...* a stunning album from beginning to end. The production is clear but steely and cold; the throaty singing is harsh, grating and severe even by black metal standards; the guitars concentrate on driving the music on and on, twisting and turning as they do so, so the overall effect they create is of a continuous blizzard (and makes Taake comparable to Burzum in that way). Fire, ice, steel and perhaps something of the old North Germanic worldview in which the individual who would be a hero is pitted against the implacable forces of Nature and occasionally wins only to be struck down again and eventually killed, inform the spirit of this recording. Track 7 in particular sums

up what I like about *Nattestid ...*: the epic and heroic aspects of the record's concept are balanced by dark minimalist, almost ambient music that concentrates on getting the job with few silly frills, but all fast and savage and turbulent. Everything you hear is lean and austere. Now that's what I call good taste! As of this time of writing (May 2005), the Taake project was put on hold by vokillist Hoest after the third album in the trilogy was completed.

JENNIFER HOR 18/05/2005
wounder@tin.it
www.avantgardemusic.com

Mütiilation
Vampires of Black Imperial Blood
[FRANCE] TRAGIC EMPIRE REX TE001 CD (2004?)

I found this album difficult to review and I'm not sure why this should be so seeing that I can't recommend it highly enough to lovers of the black arts: it's raw, thrashy, primitive in its production and incredibly E-V-I-L. Everything is just about perfect, where do I start? - I could start by flapping on about the floppy drumming and tinny cymbals that get worn down by all the bashing on most songs or I could drone on about the guitars which for most of the time grind furiously like mega-hordes of angry wasps and on occasion present a steely wall of impenetrable droning sound. Or I could muse at length about how vokillist Willy Roussel (who used to call himself Meyhna'ch) almost decapitates himself with a style of singing so abrasive it near grinds down his neck vertebrae. The album's entire production is pretty basic with just the slightest bit of echo that adds a theatrical flourish to the whole spectacle.

All the songs are quite good though my impression is that the first five pieces are better than the next four (tracks 6 - 9), perhaps due to the way they are arranged plus my expectation that albums often sag about the halfway point. I should mention that my CD copy of *Vampires...* is actually lifted from the original LP version of the album and is not the original mid-1990's CD release which had only 8 tracks arranged in a different order and including one song that doesn't appear on my CD copy. There have been numerous Internet rumours that my copy and other Tragic Empire Rex releases of Mütiilation records are pirates; I have been advised they are in fact legitimate releases. The opener 'Magical Shadows of a Tragic Past' quickly establishes the tone of the album: banks of haranguing guitars, episodes of nuclear-powered thrash rhythms, Roussel ripping his lungs apart (he's not manic actually, he's just into the, ah, spirit of things) and sounding like a pissed-off little alien dwarf, extravagantly Gothic titles and the occasional groovy tune that Roussel could sell to mobile phone companies. 'Black Imperial Blood' has quite a melodramatic turn and even sounds tragic; Roussel pours his little black heart and soul into every groan and screech and occasional belch. After the two best tracks on the album, we forge ahead into 'Eternal Empire of Majesty Death' and 'Tears of a Melancholic Vampire' (reach for the barf bag if you must with these titles but I warn you we also have 'Ravens of My Funeral', 'Under Ardailles Night' and 'Forests of an Evil Dawn' coming later), the latter track possibly being the fastest piece at Mach 2 speed, everybody hell-bent on smashing the instruments into the ground and the guitars in particular being shredded into kitty litter. Second-fastest piece is 'Transylvania' where the punk-thrash episodes of throwing everything down lighthouse stairs are leavened by a (relatively) slow middle section. Roussel's singing is a bit more relaxed here, rather like Count Dracula going down to the local blood bank, having too much to drink and now suffering a tremendous hang-over.

After 'Transylvania', the next four tracks blast away with no concessions to listeners' sensibilities: if anything, the production seems more primitive, 'Ravens...' in particular all very tinny with whining-mosquito strings and 'Under Ardailles Night' sounding very Ye Olde Punk. The final track 'The Rite of Darkness' is a cover of the song by 80s Swedish metal band Bathory whose former singer / leader Quorthon died from natural causes in 2004. Initially this song is very punk-oriented and disciplined but after the two verses and guitar solo are dispensed with quickly, it's back to familiar territory with drums being hammered into the ground and Roussel lurching from being stoned to gloating over total instrument annihilation.

In total, a class act all the way through, completely sick and over the top with many musical instrument casualties (and a huge bill) yet grand and ambitious, and a textbook example of how black metal should conduct itself, some of the time anyway. When *Vampires ...* was originally recorded, Mütiilation was a duo but now it consists of one member, Roussel himself, who borrows musicians from another band when the need arises. Mütiilation was one of a number of French BM bands known as The Black Legions (Les Legions Noires, sometimes shortened to LLN) based I think in the Languedoc-Roussillon region in southern France where apparently they all lived in a castle, sort of like a black metal Brady Bunch. The Black Legions separated some time about 1999 and some of the bands (Vlad Tepes definitely, Belketre I'm not sure about) are no longer active.

JENNIFER HOR 12/04/2005
www.ter666.cjb.net
tragic_empire_rex@yahoo.com
www.ordealis.com

A 5-CD Mütiilation box set is scheduled for a 2005 release by this label.

Revenge
Victory. Intolerance. Mastery
EU OSMOSE PRODUCTIONS OPCD167 CD (2004)

Fast. Raw. Primitive. Machine gun drums pummel ears into submission with endless rounds of depleted uranium ammunition. Bazooka guitars blast all and sundry into ashes with shit-hot blasts of fire. Steel grind bass attacks undermine buildings and reduce them to rubble. Vokillist / percussion pugilist J Read screeches peremptory commands in eight songs with lyrics that seem interchangeable as well as indecipherable. Song titles all look compressed as if rammed into brick wall at 1,000 kph (speed of this record) and all that survived was the basic chassis: 'Destiny Mastery', 'Blood Annihilation', 'Hate Oath', get the picture? (This review does!) Monster music attack on all fronts occasionally soothed by actual guitar riffs and fiery solos and tight musicianship soon lasered to death by more roaring guitar storms and exploding blast beats. Entire album lasts 28 minutes 'cause that's all it needs to reduce listeners to quivering masses of protoplasm. Until next album. I'm told this album is much like previous album, 'Triumph.Genocide. Antichrist', so maybe in-between times the masses start to evolve again and get a bit uppity. Can't let that go on for too long!

Highly recommended to fans of black metal and death metal: constant blast beats, blitzkrieg guitar attacks and speed-of-light technical mastery will appeal to death metal people; chaotic songs, insane throat-mangling and stripped-down production will appeal to black metal folk. Because music is so chaotic it verges on noise it may also

appeal to noise fans. Sense of humour needed to appreciate duo's militaristic take-no-prisoners style and lyrics which concern some character or thing called the Superion. I don't think the two guys in the band have fully figured who it / he / she is but they're going too fast for us to find out. Three hails to Canada's answer to UK '90s grindcore band Carcass and Japan's Ruins: Victory! Mastery! REVENGE!

JENNIFER HOR 20/04/2005
www.osmoseproductions.com

Striborg

Spiritual Catharsis
AUSTRALIA FINSTERNIS PRODUCTIONS finster12 CD (2004)

A very good album from that black metal Tasmaniack project Striborg, this demonstrates Striborg man Sin-nanna's increasing confidence as an all-round musician and extends the reach of the black metal art into the arenas of ambient, drone and Gothic. Plus, I am happy to report, after the near-kitsch melodrama and Donald Duck snarling of *Nocturnal Emissions / Nyctophobia* which I reviewed in TSP#12, that Sin-nanna now sounds really Pissed Off after what life has dealt to him so far and his anger and grief at the loss of his father have infused the music with renewed aggression and purpose. Along the way, our man has created a genuine and unique Australian style of black metal which draws inspiration from Tasmania's pristine landscapes of cool temperate rainforests set in valleys sculpted by glaciers in the last Ice Age and their unusual flora and fauna.

After a slow start, the standard begins to rise with track 3, 'Beneath the fields of rapacious blood', an epic piece featuring cheesed-off alien vocals, strong trance-like rhythms and percussion, and synth passages that are quaintly reminiscent of 1980s synthpop; the title track is similar but also includes a thrashy section. As with Striborg's earlier releases, buzzsaw guitars grind away continuously in the background so that other instruments come to the fore. Track 6 'The haunted gum trees' is an unusual departure: stern deep, industrial-rumbling drones churn away, warning of unspeakable horrors deep within the forests. Track 8 'Dicksonia antartica' (sic) rates highly in my book: despite the creepy singing and the monster riffs, it reflects Sin-nanna's love and wonder at the beautiful forest world with its strange animals, the 'blood curdling' possums (never seen one of these but it sure is a pity none of these creatures was let loose near Dame Edna Everage), the owls and, of course, the Tasmanian devils with their eerie screams. Only on this album could you get away with a title like 'Black metal is the forest calling ...' and appropriately enough the track itself breaches the divide between noise and black metal at blizzard speed; heavily distorted vocals scream in the distant background. Ancient ice gods roam in Antarctic winter weather through the forests and mountains, burying all under their path with endless snow blankets. 'Eternal blackness surrounds the bushland' is

a completely ambient piece with subtle effects, vaguely New Age-ish, hypnotic and sinister.

The trusty analogue 4-track was pressed into service to record the entire album which may explain the lack of 'bulk' (for want of a better word) in the music; the buzzy guitars can seem quite insubstantial at times. I don't see this as a problem; backgrounding the guitars into little more than a constant whine seems to have opened up new musical vistas for Striborg. I do notice Sin-nanna drowns his vocals in excessive layers of echo effects and realise some may be annoyed at this. Overall, the relatively polished whole far outweighs the music's limitations. One should be looking forward to where Striborg can take this music next; I think *Spiritual Catharsis* will be a hard record to follow up.

JENNIFER HOR 17/03/2005
Finsternis Productions, PO Box 54, Snug, Hobart, Tasmania 7054, Australia

Striborg

Mysterious Semblance
AUSTRALIA FINSTERNIS PRODUCTIONS finster15 CD (2005)

Possibly the weirdest and definitely the coldest album I have heard so far from this productive Tasmanian black metal project. Right away you are very aware that Striborg man Sin-nanna inhabits a shadowy forest world shrouded in isolation where his only companions are the still trees, the shy animals, the winds and the constant rain and that's how he likes to live: far, far away from the common herd in his own private sphere. A somewhat long and repetitive if eerie instrumental intro leads into the epic title track 'Mysterious Semblance of Spectral Trees': this admittedly is a very long and meandering piece which barely manages to hold together in parts and might have done with a bit of tightening here and there, yet in its own way it's a very mesmerising track with deliberately off-key bass melodies, constantly changing percussion rhythms, bewitching keyboard tones and buzzsaw guitars so faint they resemble showers of rain which effect Sin-nanna may have intended.

Between this marathon track and the last track there are five other pieces of which tracks 3 and 7 are ambient mood pieces: 'Dark storm brooding / Lightning in the south' is punctuated by thick strokes of deep rumbles and synth passages floating above; 'The screaming wind' features churning blizzard guitar noises throughout yet the impression is of isolation within the maelstrom. Sandwiched between these instrumental poems are three songs adhering to a more conventional style of black metal (relatively speaking of course) in which the guitars become more prominent and aggressive in the mix and long instrumental passages featuring driving percussion and bass dominate proceedings. What singing there is (and singing has never been Sin-nanna's strong suit, he's obviously better off displaying his all-around musical talents) usually gets drenched in lots of echo and sounds much like an enraged alien pygmy duck stuck in a steel-enclosed shaft though on one track the screaming becomes quite hellish and scary - that's one pretty angry duck all right!

The final track 'Lurking the murky damp forest' (song titles and laboured lyrics are also not exactly Sin-nanna's strong suit) features some incredibly majestic passages of black metal drama, full of sadness, longing and pained emotions: even in Sin-nanna's private world and beloved isolation, the man is not immune from the problems of existence and the melancholy these engender. It is a curious thing indeed how black metal came to concern itself with existentialist issues and the question of the individual as a free and independent agent and his / her relationship to the wider world but then that's a major part of the music's attraction for many including myself. In about the last third of this piece, the music really starts to rock out and towards the end Sin-nanna seems about to rocket off into the stratosphere on a black metal psychedelic trip - then, all of a sudden the music shuts down, leaving behind a wisp or two of ambient tone, and it's all over!

This is a very strange and unearthly recording which like previous Striborg albums revolves around the themes of darkness, misanthropy and forests but in a more melancholic vein (not that Sin-nanna's ever been a really cheery chap) than previously and therefore I recommend it highly - I like it when Sin-nanna gets pissed off at life, the universe and everything in-between ...

JENNIFER HOR 21/10/2005
Finsternis Productions, PO Box 54, Snug, Hobart, Tasmania 7054, Australia

Leviathan

Tentacles of Whorror
USA MORIBUND RECORDS DEAD 52 CD (2004)

Not greatly different from his previous *The Tenth Sub Level Of Suicide* though the ambience of the album is clearer; the first five tracks rocket away at a fast pace leavened occasionally by slow musical passages and periods of thrash. It's only when we reach track 6 'A Necessary Mutilation' that the album becomes more than a well-crafted sequel: this atmospheric interlude feels damp and murky as if Wrest has suddenly dumped us into a network of dungeons far beneath an ancient haunted Carpathian castle and we happened to have

landed in the deepest and darkest part of the labyrinth with a mysterious monster roaming somewhere about to keep our thoughts occupied. Moments of tragic beauty and majesty attend this recording (as on track 7 'Vexed and Vomit Hexed' which sounds in part a little like Godspeed You Black Emperor). Even so, despite the 2nd half of the album being more atmospheric and original than the 1st half, overall it sounds a bit derivative and doesn't have any really distinctive melodies or riffs - it seems sort of generic Leviathan. I would like to see Wrest experiment with his vocals (or vokills as they say in the business) more as an element in and of the music rather than just for singing the lyrics; also he could move more into black metal soundscapes (his vokills would be ideal for special effects) and once in a while leave out the percussion. Technically as an all-round musician Wrest has done a sterling job so far; now that we have come to expect his craftsmanship, he needs to extend his music beyond song-based territory and stretch himself creatively. There is a great potential there, it would be a pity if Wrest doesn't capitalise on it.

JENNIFER HOR 24/03/2005
www.moribundcult.com
orders@moribundcult.com

Leviathan

The Tenth Sub Level Of Suicide

USA MORIBUND RECORDS DEAD 43 CD (2003)

'How low can a person go?' you may ask - well, according to one-man band Leviathan, very, very low indeed, at least where the album's concept and lyrics are concerned. In Leviathan man Wrest's worldview, death and hell are inevitable and thus are to be accepted, even welcomed; life and hated humanity are to be shunned. A tragic grandeur attends the music even at its most aggressive and thrashy; the anger and furious pace prevent the music from seeming too despairing even at its most desperate, and from self-pity. The album's production sounds foggy as though Wrest is screaming and playing in a huge cavern behind a thick steel prison door but our man forces the situation to his advantage by creating a distinct black metal sonic universe and turning those echoing monster screams into something really unearthly. Music flows as though intuitively and Wrest maintains a solid and consistent standard throughout (though the tunes don't sound all that original). Paradoxically though the pace can be extremely fast, this is one of the more highly melodic black metal recordings I have come across and in some tracks ('Submersed' in particular) there is atmospheric beauty and majesty. I do wish there had been more moments of ambient icy-winter soundscape beauty on this CD but Leviathan seems to like playing a style of music combining traditional song-based heavy metal and other elements with black metal. Keyboard passages don't sound greatly original but seem derived from some general universal formula; I have the impression Wrest may have had quite a bit of classical or professional music training (I'm prepared to be surprised if he hasn't).

The major achievement with this album is how Wrest makes creating his own operatic black metal cosmos look so easy and so natural. Everything is solid from start to finish, there's not a filler track in-between (though no particular track jumps out), nothing can be faulted. On the other hand, with everything being such a perfectly built edifice, I find myself wishing Wrest could have allowed the odd eccentric worm-hole or two. There's just no pleasing some people, is there? And Wrest is sure to call me a mollusc - well, he can call me that and more, since in the sleeve notes he goes on to say such whingeing will ignite his metal.

JENNIFER HOR 15/03/2005
www.moribundcult.com
moribund@waypt.com

Ildjarn

1992 - 1995

FINLAND NORTHERN HERITAGE NH-025 CD (2002)

Now here's a guy who's got more reason than most to feel bitter at the fate life has dealt him. In his younger days Ildjarn was a member of the short-lived death metal band Thou Shalt Suffer which also included two guys calling themselves Samoth and Ihsahn; when TSS folded, Ildjarn was set to join the replacement band being formed by his ex-TSS colleagues but it would seem his mother, concerned at the company he was keeping, prevented him from so doing. Since then the band Emperor have become a major black metal legend and their reputation as innovators who pioneered a style known as symphonic black metal continues even after the group's break-up; the Norwegian town Notodden awarded singer (now music teacher) Ihsahn its culture prize in 2002 for being its best known citizen. In the meantime, Ildjarn has forged his own lonely path in the underground music world and this compilation covers a 3-year period in his musical development.

All the songs are very short, none longer than 5 minutes and most only about 2 - 3 minutes in length. Structurally they're all basic to the point where they seem ultra-primitive: in most songs, the rhythm section

bangs away without much variation at a regular if not especially fast pace. Most of the time Ildjarn roars like a furious monster with heavily distorted and harsh vocals but there are a few songs where he's almost whispering into the microphone as if he has a terrible secret to impart. Needless to say the production is also pretty basic and the result is an incredibly raw and primitive style of minimalist metal which effectively conveys Ildjarn's fury and hatred of the world around him; his anger is so deep and intense you almost feel it ripping through his body as he vents his bile against feeble humanity.

Difficult to say which are the real stand-out tracks as amazingly for music with such simple parameters it's varied and in its own way well-crafted if rather severe but I single out 'Whispering Breeze', a piece of false advertising if ever there was one as it's the closest to a raging winter blizzard I've ever heard of all black metal; 'Skogrommet' for its distinctive rhythm; 'Taakeheim'; the crabby-sounding 'Morket Slynger Seg'; the droning 'Krigere'; and 'Visions of the South (2nd Returning)' in which the rhythm texture actually changes throughout the piece. Some songs, like 'The Blade Flares in Red Light', are as primitive in structure as it's possible for music to get. The creativity and variety of music is astounding: you think after 20-plus songs Ildjarn has done all he can and then he unleashes a near-industrial piece like 'Svarte Fjell' or 'Krigere' which in some ways is quite unusual with long guitar drones mixed in with the constant rhythms.

At over 72 minutes, it's an exhausting experience which in itself says a great deal about how Ildjarn achieves his aims but for some listeners this anthology might be best sampled in bits and pieces rather than all at once. There's not much evidence of what we'd call 'progress' in the music and the cd package gives no indication of when each and every track was first recorded (there are some pieces on the album not previously released). If an artist could build a career

based entirely around rhythm textures and simple melodies using only guitars and drum machines and nothing else, Ildjarn is your man. Although I rate the music very highly, the ascetic minimalism, very raw atmosphere, lo-fi aesthetic and intense emotions do not make it an album that will appeal to most heavy metal fans let alone everyone else.

Some time after 1995, Ildjarn switched over to composing ambient music; so far I have heard only 'Hardangervidda' from this phase of his career but did not think it remarkable in any way. His black metal reputation however is assured among many musicians in the genre; in an April 2005 interview on Stephen O'Malley's website (www.ideologic.org), Tasmanian black metal man Sin-Nanna of Striborg named Ildjarn as one of his favourite artists.

JENNIFER HOR 27/04/2005
Northern Heritage, PO Box 21, 14151 Lahti, Finland

Forest
Like A Blaze Above the Ashes
GREECE ISO666 RELEASES IS20 CD (2003)

I'm not sure how easy this record will be to obtain for many TSP readers but if you can find a copy, it's quite worthwhile listening to despite its unevenness. Forest play a very severe, almost militaristic style of black metal minimalism, extremely fast and fierce thanks to relentless drum machine rhythms and just as frenetic tremolo guitar-playing that virtually hums, combined with equally minimum production that imparts a stark, chilly atmosphere to the entire recording. Vokills are very distant, harsh and filled with pain and anguish. The first couple of tracks don't sound greatly different from each other and one needs to pay fairly close attention to the riffing of the second piece to realise that it does change as it progresses, especially towards the end. Both songs tear along at much the same breathless speed to the extent that the guitars form a continuous noisy blizzard. Monotonous and machine-like, yes, I'd agree and I would also say this half of the CD is the weaker half but all the same the music in its apparent simplicity is very mesmerising and trance-like, and if this was the aim of the band, then it has done its job efficiently and well and I need say no more.

The music really starts to shine on tracks 3 and 4, particularly on track 3, 'To the Fiercest Frost', which divides into three parts. A long and very noisy fuzzy guitar introduction with a sound so raw it would strip the paint of your house or apartment walls and rip the stuffing out of your furniture if you're not paying attention, and beneath which someone occasionally strums a balalaika or a similar kind of instrument, leads into a slow and solemn rhythmic march of impenetrable steely riffs beyond which there is distant singing. There's an air of tragic drama and to be honest I don't mind the structural monotony and repetition - the guitar sound is great, the singing is heart-felt and everything sounds majestic and lofty yet incredibly sad. There's a break for a burst of guitar noise and the piece goes quite speedy for several minutes in a way that suggest a fast-flowing river of melancholic drone.

'Obscurity' is another surprise: BM meets opera (well, just baritone) singing! A doleful guitar melody repeating over and over is accompanied by a lone voice sorrowfully keening for fallen heroes whose bodies will soon be made invisible by snowfall and frost. Pretentious this may sound but the austere minimalist approach of the music and its production and the emotion make this track an impressive effort. The subject matter of war and its aftermath (as suggested by the track titles) is treated solemnly and with dignity and Forest in its own way using the resources at hand makes a valiant effort and succeeds most of the time. Breaks in the music, especially in tracks 3 and 4, may suggest unsureness at times or just plain bad editing, or they may even be intentional; possibly the limitations of the equipment and recording facilities the band had to use are also to blame.

Forest is one of a number of Russian BM bands that form the Blazebirth Hall group based in Novomoskovsk, a town in Tula Oblast about 100 kilometres south of Moscow. These bands are admittedly not politically correct - some of them sing about

Aryanism and white power among other things, though how much of this interest is actually a form of Slav pride, some manifestation of extreme nationalism or simply a desire to upset people I am not sure of at this time of writing (June 2005) - and, like the French Black Legions, often share members: the one original member of Forest, Kaldrad, is also a member of Branikald, Raven Dark (along with the second current Forest member Ulv Gegner Irminsson) and Vargleide. When the album under review was being recorded in 1997, the band consisted of Kaldrad and Dagorath who left the group a year after the album was finished, apparently severing all ties with the Russian BM scene, and is now reported to be dead.

JENNIFER HOR 06/06/2005
www.info-black.com
info-black@email.com

Caninus
Now the Animals have a Voice
USA WAR TORN RECORDS
WTR001 CD (2004)

Yes indeed! A very cute 'album' from death metal act Caninus who boast two American pit bull terriers Budgie and Basil as lead vokillists - and my word, the dogs acquit themselves very well here, helped of course by their human assistants who put the dogs' vokills and the music together with meticulous care. Absolutely no swearing, no incomprehensible senior high school purple prose lyrics and no babbling about hating the world, or hating people, or hating the state of the bedroom upon waking, no, we just have all-out raw canine guttural death metal growls and barking commands. The music itself is pretty much standard death metal fare, nothing really out of the ordinary. There is one track 'Fear of Dogs' with a slight ethnic (sort of Middle Eastern) feel and the following track features a Napalm Death-like intro. Blast beats, technically complex rhythms and short speedy guitar solos with just a bit of acoustic guitar are all there but the dogs are the stars of the show and they sure do shine.

Possibly some people may be put off by what might be perceived as a political agenda against the media and institutions that denigrate American pit bull terriers but this debate is within the CD sleeve 'lyrics' (and who really knows what the dogs were singing about?) and isn't part of the music.

Where Caninus can take their act next is hard to predict; I hear they've done a split record with Hatebeak, another animalistic death metal act featuring Waldo, an African Grey parrot, on lead vokills. The parrot apparently doesn't like very loud noises so I guess touring together is out (and the vokillists might not get on together well - I guess some things about rock stars don't change). I envisage future Caninus studio releases involving guest musicians such as the Thai Elephant Orchestra and various guest vokillists of all sizes, shapes, colours and vokillising ability, all tackling various lyrical subject matter such as humans coveting animal fur, the exploitation of animals by pharmaceutical firms for profit and battery farming. Yes, when I think about it, there's great potential in bands like Caninus whose lead singers are cute, cuddly, modest, not given to pontificating about how to fix the world's problems and not at all egomaniac: ideal role models for the world's youth and indeed the rest of us to follow.

JENNIFER HOR 31/05/2005
www.wartornrecords.com

Deathspell Omega
Si Monumentum Requires, Circumspice
FRANCE NORMA EVANGELIUM DIABOLI NEDCD005 CD (2004)

An impeccably presented package with thoughtful lyrics and an excellent production with clear and powerful sound is the first impression of this recording; however as concept albums reflecting on the nature of evil, the role of religious faith and the place humans occupy within this debate go, I find this album unsatisfying and disappointing.

Simply, the concept itself makes certain demands of the music which the record doesn't quite meet. Admittedly the music (fairly generic black metal) on its own is quite good but doesn't boast any really memorable or outstanding tunes or riffs until track 7 (and even then, only track 7) and this is a problem in itself: one expects that such weighty theological subject matter as what we have here needs a lot of musical depth and substance, plenty of atmosphere and considerable sonic dynamics, and even emotional and intellectual dynamism, if only to catch the audience's attention let alone interest people in its arguments, and the DSO record is lacking in all of these. Here the precise sound quality is a liability of sorts because with everything pretty much up-front, there's no sense of depth; the constant feverish pace of the music leaves little room for atmosphere or quiet time for listeners to ponder the philosophical issues (the dense and rather pretentious lyrics may be a turn-off for some); the power of the music, while it's necessary, is in-your-face constant from start to finish and this doesn't help to engage listeners much either. Boredom is an ever-present danger and one is not left with any sense of the importance or majesty of the issues that inspired this record.

It's a real pity that this album fails to grapple with its subject matter, as the black metal genre as it now stands possesses the maturity and versatility to tackle this debate. A combination of raw, primitive and powerful black metal, some thrash / punk influences maybe, dark ambient / industrial / electronic elements and even some symphonic / orchestral flourishes (and let's have an all-male Russian Orthodox cathedral choir instead of bloodless Gregorian chanting) might be what's needed along with a more direct lyric-writing approach - yes, maybe such an album should have been made by a Russian BM band holed up in a filthy, decaying mining or factory city in Siberia where unemployment is the norm and poverty, violence and death stalk the streets and threaten even the cultured classes. Satan deserves no less than top quality music to represent Him!

As DSO plan to record another two albums as sequels to this recording, one hopes the group (well, at this time of writing DSO was a one-man project) will adopt a more varied approach with perhaps guest musicians to help out: fellow French musician Willy Roussel of Mütiilation may be uniquely qualified in this respect since he's supposed to have come back from the dead in the late 1990s, though why he didn't bring back famous Norwegian BM musicians Dead and Euronymous or at least a recipe for cooking lambs' brains he has not yet explained.

JENNIFER HOR 30/05/2005
www.noevdia.com
info@noevdia.com

Beherit
Drawing Down The Moon
FINLAND SPINEFARM RECORDS
SPF 14 CD (1993)

Probably because this record is low on the pyrotechnics and high on the subtlety, I have been rather slow to appreciate its value in the BM canon. While other bands of that ilk shred their guitars into sawdust and pummel the drums into crepes, Beherit opt for a mostly no-frills BM minimalism with a clean production that gives the music depth and a spacious quality. The singing is deep with just the right amount of reverb to achieve the necessary sinister effect without submerging it completely, the music is riff-based and deep enough to straddle the border between BM and death metal which at the time of the record's release in the early 1990s was somewhat unusual. Overall this is an album whose streamlined approach to BM suggests a controlled fury and hatred in the music: a power, cold and smooth and subtle yet vile and sinister, that runs very deep. Elegance and efficiency are not qualities that spring to mind in talking about BM but this very elegant and very efficient album impresses with its deft touches, be they in the judicious use of atmosphere and drama, the cold and steely production, the occasional use of spoken voice or clean vocals, or in the use of instruments other than guitars and drums.

As the songs are fairly short and not all that distinctive (with the exception of 'Summerlands' but even that track is mostly repetitive like the others), the album is best appreciated as though it were a whole epic rather than as a bunch of songs put together. This record incidentally seems to have set an early standard for Finnish BM to the extent that many Finnish BM bands are still judged on whether they're as good as Beherit were in 1993 (after that year, the band moved into dark ambient music territory). The Finnish BM scene is considered one of the best in the world; it's said to be quite psychotic and that's got my little brain cells all a-shudder with excitement.

JENNIFER HOR 04/07/2005
www.spinefarm.fi

Belketre
Ambre Zuerkl
Vuorhdrevarvtre
[FRANCE] TRAGIC EMPIRE REX
TECD004 CD (2005)

Vlad Tepes
La Morte Luna
[FRANCE] TRAGIC EMPIRE REX
TECD005 CD (2005)

In the 1990s there was a small and secretive network of black metal bands drawn from the culturally unfashionable southern and western parts of France calling themselves the Black Legions (Les Legions Noires), who in total released over a hundred recordings, mostly demos and a few full-length albums and split CDs and LPs. These recordings are hard to come by and many are possibly only being traded among close friends and associates of the bands. One quite rare LLN recording is Belketre's *Ambre ...* which is just over 32 minutes long and might originally have been intended as an EP release. Of the ten untitled tracks on this CD, the ones I prefer are track 1, an instrumental intro in which a desolate guitar siren repeats a basic riff over and over against a rapid machine-like rhythm buzz; and track 10 (the outro) in which two guitars repeat two separate riffs in parallel, varying as the track progresses: very simple but very grim and sombre - black metal minimalism at its most despairing. In-between, the music is mostly rock-oriented with punk influences, a distinctive trebly guitar sound and furious rhythms full of anger and hate; the guttural singing brims with alien hostility. Sound production is extremely poor (on many tracks there's a long continuous drone in the background) which actually enhances the negative atmosphere and the aggression and brutality; track 5 in particular, an instrumental drum machine rhythm texture, comes across like a pulsing tornado beast straining against the speakers and threatening to burst out. Overall this is quite a good recording, notable for the instrumental pieces (I think so anyway), the atmosphere and the inhuman rhythms.

Even poorer in sound quality and also rock-oriented with slightly slower rhythms and deeper vocals is the Vlad Tepes recording *La Morte Luna*; the music here is more melodic and even has a few catchy tunes (!) and, as with the Belketre recording, the sound production, crappy though it is (and you must turn up the volume to hear anything as well), seems to make VL sound a lot more hellish and threatening than a clear production would. The guitars at any rate seem unaffected and roar on regardless of technical niceties. The music in some respects is better than on the previous CD under review if less inclined to dip into minimalist ambience; the musicians often seem more concerned with pounding and shredding their instruments into the dirt than playing them! Splinters fly out of the speakers, everyone ducks for cover and the odd spring or two just misses hitting you in the eye and coming clean out the back of your head. There's a definite punk influence which seems to be a common denominator with the Black Legions groups, according to what I have seen on the Internet. As you might expect with a band called Vlad Tepes,

the singing is pretty blood-curdling, more so because, well, these guys are French, and French accents combined with guttural throat-shredding have quite a terrible effect on the ear-drums!

Best tracks include 'Morts', a cartoony piece in which vampires and divers nocturnal friends suffering severe apnoea attempt to get some sleep while a bass guitar gingerly tiptoes around them; 'Meurtres...' which is what you have when you shove a bunch of starving vampires into a pit they can't get out of and suspend a bag of blood products just out of reach over their heads while a squalling guitar teases them; and the title track which is short but stately and tragic in a Romantic kind of way. A couple of tracks 'Morgensterne' and 'I Died From a Vampiric Grief' stand out if only because the sound quality is a bit better than on the first four pieces where it's really bad. Generally the latter half of the CD, revolving around the theme of the creatures of the night with titles like 'L'Envoi du Corbeau' ('Crow's Envoy') and 'I Died ...', has better music than the first half which is about war and slaughter.

The poor sound quality of these two recordings will deter all but the most determined and diehard black metal addicts (that is, the people whom everyone else has given up for dead - you know who they are) which is a real pity as there are some good-to-excellent musical gems to be found here. Despite the Black Legions' desire to stay, well, exclusive and 'kvlt', the quality of some of the music they produced was such (if at times inconsistent) that people across the globe were bound to pass the news about them over Internet chatrooms and music trading networks with many canards and much overhype flying about. As far as I know Vlad Tepes have split though one still hears rumours that the band circulates new recordings among close pals; as for Belketre, I do not know if they or the band members' separate projects are still continuing. By the way, children, a good piece of advice: if you want your bands to stay exclusive and 'kvlt', record only crappy music that nobody wants to hear!

JENNIFER HOR 09/05/2005
www.ter666.cjb.net
tragic_empire_rex@yahoo.com

Katharsis

Kruzifixxion

FRANCE NORMA EVANGELIUM DIABOLI NED001 CD (2003)

Were it not for the production which to me seems rather too crisp and makes this German BM band sound tinny and cartoonish, I'd have given this record a higher recommendation mainly for the enthusiasm and energy the musicians invest in the album, their second so far and the first release for French-based BM specialist label Norma Evangelium Diaboli which has since reissued the band's first album. The Katharsis style involves lots of rapid-fire blast beats, whining chainsaw tremolo guitars and extremely harsh and unearthly screaming that makes your own throat feel sore to say nothing of what the vokillist himself must feel! The music is very raw, bleedingly so much of the time, and the melodies are sinister enough, though with 'better' (that is, technically worse) production and the 'right' atmosphere they could sound even more evil and aggressive. Track 5, 'The Chosen One' in particular has some of the best melodies I've heard so far in the BM genre and the band does right in keeping this track fairly minimal with the speed and most of the musical variation bunched up in the middle of the song; the ending is quite majestic with a hint of keyboards behind the steaming guitars as befits the Faustian pact entered into in the song. Yes, as you might expect, Katharsis bang on about praising Satan and entering into alliance with Him and His legions, and there are the usual cliched heavy metal references such as sacrificing seven holy virgins (to the musicians' appetites, not to that of the Dark One Himself - but the boys didn't specify the girls' ages so maybe they'll get a bunch of toothless aged harpies!) in the laboured and dense lyrics though the imagery is quite vivid. The singing seems at variance with much of the music and the vokillist frequently declaims as well as sings the lyrics in quite a heartbreaking and painful style at times.

There are six songs with four short 'hidden' whispered tracks interspersed throughout which means you must hear the CD fairly

loudly - this of course means nearly every song begins with a huge blast of noise and screaming! Of the songs I'd say 'The Chosen One', 'Blood stainth the temple stones' (sic) and 'Infernal Solar Vortexx' are the most outstanding, the first two for their melodies and riffs and the last for the inspired chaos in parts. Best suited for those who like their black metal raw and raucous, raging and harsh, but I have to advise the record's not the most original release and doesn't extend the dimensions of Satanic black metal either lyrically or musically. Certainly there is humour in the album and the musicians don't appear to take themselves all that seriously but humour and passion won't count for much if the song-writing borders on the lazy and many BM fans are nothing if not picky!

JENNIFER HOR 02/08/2005
www.noevdia.com

Blut Aus Nord

The Work Which Transforms God / Thematic Emanation of Archetypal Multiplicity

USA CANDLELIGHT RECORDS CDL0104CD 2 x CD (2005)

This is a double set combining a full-length album *The Work ...*, originally released in 2003, and a recent EP *Thematic Emanation ...* intended to introduce French black metal band Blut Aus Nord to a more mainstream hard rock / heavy metal audience in the United States. One notes that changes, not necessarily for the worse (but also not for the better), have taken place. On the album, the fierce blizzard guitar drone attack and the riff-based structures of the earlier *The Mystical Beast of Rebellion* have given way to cleaner guitar tones (and some loss of aggression) and a more melodic and less repetitive approach to structuring the music; although the rhythms can still be fast and the dissonant seesawing guitar chords remain, at least in the earlier half of the album; the effect overall is to make the music sound more death metal than black metal. Atmosphere is an important part of the band's style and there are dollops of the dark sinister kind with reverb aplenty on a number of tracks. My impression of this recording as it progresses is that generally the music tends to slow down though short passages of blast beats and furious guitar-shredding still occur; long passages of melodic guitar playing become more frequent and there's a greater reliance on ambient special effects, a sinister feel and not a little bombast. Although the album as a whole is not too bad, it does present a mishmash of styles: black / death metal near the beginning, melodic in the middle and, towards the end, more sludge / near-industrial rock with wisps of ambience throughout. Are Vindsval and friends still trying to make up their minds how they want to sound in front of an American audience who may be unfamiliar with European heavy metal? Or do they hope to condense 5 - 10 years of musical evolution onto one album? The final track, 'Procession of the Dead Clowns' is a monotonous dirge of industrial metal with a ponderous beat and lots of echo that needs nearly 10 minutes to make its point which most listeners, American or otherwise, will get in a fraction of the playing time.

The EP seems to have even more of an identity crisis as suggested by its title and the sub-titles of the work's five movements: the transformed entity of *The Work ...* undergoes a sort of Neo-Platonic series of emanations from higher to lower or lower to higher, it's a bit difficult to tell. (Usually in

Neo-Platonic philosophical explanations of the creation of the universe, creation proceeds from higher to lower and this interpretation would most suit Blut Aus Nord's take on this philosophy.) The music reflects this transformation: the first two movements are bombastic sludge metal, heavy on the atmospheric effects and reverb, and very dreary and plodding as well. After some metaphysical trauma on Level 1 (track 2), the style becomes electro-industrial and heavily structured around machine-generated beats and a strong driving bass rhythm on Level 2 (track 3) as though the entity has entered a bizarre macho heavy industrial gay disco club where patrons need at least three huge bolts of steel through their heads to gain admittance and order highly corrosive battery acid drinks laced with jet fuel at the bar: the sort of place that won't have Judas Priest's Rob Halford because he's not metal enough. (Now that really would give him an identity crisis!) At Level 3 (track 4), the music enters goth-ambient territory with funereal singing and Tibetan Buddhist monk chanting. Washes of sound suggesting ghostly choirs rise and fall in the background. In the final track a sudden hysterical violin flourish suggests a fall into a deep abyss full of unpleasant gobbling creatures: well, the piece isn't called 'Exit (Towards the Asylum)' for nothing! Welcome to Planet Earth, Whoever Thou be! The entire EP reveals itself thus as a cruel or sarcastic metaphysical joke. Jesus Christ Almighty! (Pun intended.)

At this point it's hard to say where Blut Aus Nord will go next with their music and their religious and philosophical preoccupations but one has the impression they will not soon revisit the territory of black metal. On the other hand the arena in which dwell bands like Daft Punk still seems far off though Vindsval and friends have edged closer to it. Funnily enough, though Blut Aus Nord appear to be farewelling their black metal roots here on this double release, these recordings also feature Blut Aus Nord as a proper band with more or less regular professional musicians, as opposed to being a one-man project, for the first time. Next thing you know, these guys will be appearing in magazines like *Kerrang!* dressed in black suits and sunglasses.

If you chance to find these recordings separately, the album is passable for purchase but not the EP: I find track 3 of the EP too reliant on dance-clubby rhythms to the extent where it seems the band is getting lazy. You would be better off chasing the band's earlier work through the Internet or your local neighbourhood record shop.

JENNIFER HOR 19/07/2005
www.candlelightrecordsusa.com
www.candlelightrecords.co.uk

Mütiilation

Evil - The Gestalt of Abomination
FRANCE TRAGIC EMPIRE REX
TECD002 CD (2004?)

Originally this recording was to be French black metal band Mütiilation's debut album in 1993(?) but I believe the label that was supposed to have released it was very obscure and quite flaky and eventually *Vampires of Black Imperial Blood*, actually the band's second album, ended up being the debut. The first five tracks of *Evil ...* were repackaged onto a compilation *Remains of a Ruined, Dead, Cursed Soul*: they are all very good pieces though not as flamboyant and melodramatic as *Vampires ...*; still, they are very raw with bleeding guitars, are quite melodic and not especially fast for black metal (passages in some tracks are even loping) and all feature Lord Meyhna'ch / Willy Roussel's rasping screams and roars. Unfortunately with this particular TER release the lyrics are not printed but the

track titles give some indication of Meyhna'ch's interests: among other things, these include vampires ('To the Memory of the Dark Countess' - well, who could the dark countess be but Erzsebet Bathory herself?) and hating people and maybe even himself ('Travels to Sadness, Hate and Depression'). The songs barely hang together and show a punk / thrash influence and Meyhna'ch throws tantrums galore but overall these tracks are good, even the sound quality seems quite good given that these TER releases are continually being dogged by rumours that they are pirates (though the label seems reliable enough and the quality of the Mütiilation CDs I have heard so far has been consistent) and something of the spirit of rock-'n'-roll / punk can be gleaned in these tracks.

The second half of the CD consists of four tracks that sound rather like very early and somewhat derivative demos: 'The Fear that Freeze' sounds very Mayhem-influenced, Meyhna'ch here doing his best drunken Attila Csihar impersonation and, at the end, a convincing demonstration of self-strangulation; 'Holocaust in Mourning Dawn' is also Mayhem-influenced with Meyhna'ch drooling away in blood-curdling French. These songs plus track 8 all are very fast and primitive with whirlwind guitars and sound as though they had been recorded in an underground cavern: they seem to have the patina of old 1920s art movie soundtracks for some strange reason, at least to my ears. Meyhna'ch puts in an impressive if very campy performance of frightening small children with his lascivious groans, growls and screams. The last track (track 9 and very obviously a bonus track) seems even more primitive and very punky, collapsing in the middle somewhere with the creepiest, cartooniest vampire and monster noises and at the end of it all, Meyna'ch, perhaps by now disgusted with his own performance, starts gagging and throwing up.

If I say any more about the black metal comedy that is Mütiilation and in particular Willy Roussel (Meyhna'ch having died in 1996 after 330 years of self-loathing existence), someone is sure to come and wallop me so I'll conclude this review by observing that *Evil ...* and *Vampires ...* are essential Mütiilation recordings to own; from what I have read about later Mütiilation recordings and my own impression of the album *Grimly Reborn: Black Millennium*, released in 2001, these works don't match the early music in sheer demented genius. At this time of writing (Bastille Day, 2005), Mütiilation had released a split CD with fellow French black metallers Malicious Secrets on which Mütiilation perform a cover of the famous karaoke standard 'My Way' so make of that what you will. I mentioned this split CD to the guy at Metropolis whose job title is something like Le Commandant Superieur des Armees Unites des Legions Noires, des Autres Musiques Sataniques, des Musiques du Brazil et Japon et de la Musique pour Enfants et Bebes and all I've had so far in the way of a response is a sort of stunned or polite silence. And if you want to know why he's associated with music for small children, look out for his contribution to the Staubgold compilation *Childish Music*, there's at least one Australian artist featured.

JENNIFER HOR 13/07/2005
Tragic Empire Rex : www.ter666.cjb.net
tragic_empire_rex@yahoo.com
Ordealis Records: www.ordealis.com, are officially licensed to sell Mütiilation products including DVDs and T-shirts.

Mortifera

Vastiia Tenebrd Mortifera
AUSTRALIA GOATOWAREX
SDL006 CD (2004?)

Originally begun as a side-project by a member of the French BM band Celestia and for this recording including a second member from that band, Mortifera play a style of BM more melancholy than misanthropic and angry, and more tuneful and melodic than blisteringly raw and minimalist. On most songs, the rhythms can still be rough and the singing is pretty gravelly but the mood is oriented in a more Gothic / Romantic direction. Acoustic guitar with slight bluesy tones makes frequent if brief appearances throughout the album, giving the listener plenty of quiet time to ponder the esoteric song titles: 'Fvrahgments', 'Aux Confins des Tenebrss' and 'Abstrbve Negabvtiyon Rebssurectyion' to name a few. For some strange reason, 'Ciel Brouille', featuring lyrics from a Charles Baudelaire poem, reminds me a bit of the Godspeed You Black Emperor / The Silver Mt Zion Orchestra complex with maybe Hoest from Norwegian BM group Taake on microphone duties; yes, that tragic yet hopeful air is there which continues onto the next song. As the CD progresses though, the dominant mood goes from sad to sadder until we reach 'Fruits of a Tragic End' which - surprise, surprise! - is a cover of a Celestia song.

I'm not sure why Noktu Geistmortt started the Mortifera project, seeing that this album features Celestia members and even redoes a Celestia song; I've heard that Mortifera's style also doesn't differ much from Celestia's. Probably Mortifera deals with different subject matter (the inevitability of death and the sadness that such knowledge brings) from what Celestia normally covers. The music can be powerful at times with a certain tragic majesty about it and if the vocals were clean and not so distant, Mortifera could very well appeal to a Goth audience. The standard of playing is consistent as are also the songs though there is not much that could be called great or inspired and funnily there's not that much of a creepy atmosphere despite the music having been recorded in a 'deep cold cave' somewhere in southern France; now, if that's not pretentiously Gothic, I don't know what is.

JENNIFER HOR 26/08/2005
GoatowaRex, c/o Dani Li, PO Box 1467, Macquarie Centre, NSW, 2113, Australia
goatowarex@yahoo.com.au
http://slingshot.to/goatowarex

Blackdeath
Saturn Sector
GREECE ISO666 RELEASES IS09 CD (2002)

Originally released in the late 1990s I think and reissued in 2002 with two extra tracks, this offering by the Russian BM duo distinguishes itself mainly by the sheer ferocity of the music, essentially raw and primitive BM minimalism which effectively conveys the musicians' loathing for humanity and anger. The singing is so gravelly and inhuman, one can easily imagine the vokillist (presumably Abysslooker as he wrote most of the lyrics) is singing in a language known only in the deepest parts of Hell where despair and hate reign supreme. The printed lyrics are fairly straightforward given that a number of tracks pay obligatory homage to Satan (and also display an interest in numbers) and their delivery is even more minimal given that the music is fast. As the CD progresses, ambient elements make an appearance on 'Annihilate Thy Forest' and two tracks further on use excerpts of Modest Mussorgsky's 'Pictures at an Exhibition' with one piece also featuring some lively organ playing. 'The Apocalyptic Sacrifice' is a doomy and relatively slow track on an album where most of the music charges at blistering speed. Overall I have the impression that there's a sort of inspired if demented genius behind this record particularly when the bonus tracks come on: 'A Masque of the Black Death' (ha ha) is pretty much electro-industrial and 'The Number' is a punkish roar with hilarious garbled lyrics delivered at what seems to be three times the speed of the rest of the music. Could be the guys are taking the mickey out of themselves - no wonder the vokillist (this time I think it's the other guy Para Bellum since he wrote the lyrics for this piece) is reduced to screaming in frustration at the end. For this reason, I find myself enjoying this record quite a lot at present even though the music generally doesn't vary a lot (the variations are in the details of the songs) and the sentiments therein are not necessarily those I'd espouse. Looking at the musicians' pictures - the members look rather like ex-convicts or ex-soldiers, photographed the way Leni Riefenstahl might have done them if they'd been athletes - I don't think I'd like to get into an argument with the fellas, good-humoured and cultured though they may well be, over what inspires their music (two songs are inspired by dreams by the way); as far as I'm concerned, the music does its job and does it effectively.

The two members of Blackdeath also have a dark ambient / electronic music project called Cthulhu Biomechanical which so far has released two demos for anyone who's interested.

JENNIFER HOR 24/08/2005
info-black@email.com
www.info-black.com
PO Box 607, St Petersburg, 189510, Russia

Graveland
The Celtic Winter
GERMANY NO COLOURS RECORDS NC010 CD (1996)

Recorded in 1993 but not released in full until 1996 (an EP of the same name but with half the songs was doing the rounds during the mid-1990's), this recording derives from the early phase of Graveland's career in black metal when the music was very much influenced by famous Norwegian BM bands like Darkthrone and Emperor, and the title reflects vocalist/guitarist/keyboardist Rob Darken's early interest in ancient Celtic cultures. (As many of you know, Darken has since latched onto north Germanic / Viking culture for his inspiration.) *The Celtic Winter* is thus not representative of the band's style - as BM bands go, Graveland has had many releases and I understand that since 1996 the music has pushed in a different, more melodic direction with folk influences - but it's a good entry point into the band's corpus: you get some idea in the early half of the CD of where the band is coming from and in the latter half you can sense the talent (of Rob Darken anyway; the other member in the band at the time of recording, Capricornus, was restricted to playing drums and only realised his creative potential with side projects such as Thor's Hammer) and potential the band would later capitalise on.

I'll grant that parts of this CD can seem rather corny and there's nothing like a church organ (a church organ!?) to bolster and pad out the music and make it sound more malevolent and imposing than it deserves to be (though Darken uses the organ sparingly, still it's very overpowering and seems uneven and ragged), otherwise the music is pretty good: the pace is not especially fast and on latter tracks it's quite relaxed and allows you to hear some nice strumming mandolin and tremolo guitar. Good melodies in some songs bring out the aggression, the hate and the sinister ambience. Songs appear to be chaotic but there's an underlying order and regularity. Darken sings like one undergoing transformation into a particularly nasty-tempered werewolf with a hundred scores to settle and rocks in his throat. As all-round BM musicians go, there are probably few who can match this guy, especially in the way he arranges the mix of guitars and keyboards (though as mentioned earlier the organ is a little bit of a problem) and the way he balances minimalism with a slightly more baroque approach. Possibly a bit more atmosphere and a slightly foggier production might have improved the recording but as it is I'm not complaining. (I wish the lyrics had been printed as well.)

When this album was being recorded, Graveland was a duo but after various comings and goings of Capricornus and one or two others (one ex-member is apparently dead), the group currently consists of just Darken. At this time of writing, there was an album being readied for a release during the northern autumn of 2005 so one presumes he's got someone on percussion duties or has discovered the joys of programming drum machines. I am aware of Graveland's National Socialist affiliations which certainly help provide some of the inspiration and the emotions that power the music but without an understanding of modern Polish society and culture, the role of nationalism and religion in Poland's history and how these united the Polish people for better and for worse when they did not have a country for over one hundred years, I say it is too simplistic to just write off Graveland and its members' side projects as white supremacists and purveyors of neo-fascist Aryan pride (though they are extreme in their beliefs) without understanding the society in which they grew up and still live. There is also a worldview of sorts that informs underground black metal which takes in elements of Romanticism, nature worship and other ideologies long thought

to have been ground under the juggernaut of consumer materialism, economic rationalism and corporate globalisation but the popularity of black metal and related musics throughout the world demonstrates the resilience of the older belief systems.

JENNIFER HOR 22/08/2005
www.no-colours-records.de
info@no-colours-records.de

Hate Forest
Battlefields
UK SUPERNAL MUSIC
FERLY013CD CD (2003)

The inclusion of four traditional folk songs sung exclusively by women with no musical accompaniment on an otherwise grandiose and epic symphonic black metal album may surprise many and, for a few, signal a dangerous detour into slobbery poodle-rock territory (though the band's subsequent work would dispel such fears) but this unusual mix jells together well with each music providing a counterpoint to the other and the album's theme of war and suffering is enhanced as a result. The women's singing is all melody and vocal polyphony, close to nature and expresses hope, encouragement, foreboding and grief in turns. Hate Forest's music itself (three long pieces) by contrast is heroic and majestic in scope yet close to the spirit of raw and primitive BM combined with doom metal elements. Often the guitars are sidelined to the extent where they merely provided a constant blizzard backdrop to the grand spectacle of hammers clanking on anvils, synthesised orchestral flourishes that sweep over the music yet remain quite minimal, timpani-style drumming and synthesised male choirs that roar defiance before the oncoming enemy.

Of the three BM tracks, the best one for me is 'Our Fading Horizons' which is highly atmospheric thanks to the juxtaposition of male choral singing and showers of raw distorted guitars; this alternates with more bombastic rhythms and synthesised orchestral battle-music. The drum machine is used effectively to suggest the advance of armies and with conventional military drumming going on as well, sets up a polyphonic rhythmic effect which I think is intended to be hypnotic but doesn't quite seem so. The orchestral music can be rather cliched but the BM ethos keeps it tight and prevents it from becoming overly melodramatic. 'Glare over Slavonic Lands' is a slower, more sorrowful piece with a loping rhythm that invites comparison with Polish BM band Graveland's style of epic war BM. Choral singing and guitar blizzards combine again, this time as a background for the expression of melancholy at the battle lost and for the war dead.

This is a short recording (about 35 minutes) which makes it an ideal introduction into Hate Forest's patriotic meditation on the history of their country Ukraine and into eastern European symphonic BM. For many people, the inclusion of portraits of four Ukrainian military heroes on the CD sleeve will be controversial as one figure featured is the famous Cossack leader Bohdan Khmelnytsky, revered by Ukrainians as a founder of an independent and partly democratic Cossack state in the mid-1600s after leading a rebellion against the Polish feudal lords ruling the country in 1648. (The state didn't last long by the way.) Bizarrely, the Soviet Union tried to claim him as a proletarian hero and created a military order in his name. Khmelnytsky also hated Jews (the Poles used Jews to collect taxes from the Ukrainians and other subject peoples and in this role the Jews were seen as an extension of the hated feudal lords; problem was, when trouble blew up in 1648, the Poles and the rich Jews who did the actual collecting fled, leaving behind poor Jews to bear the brunt of the violence) and he and his followers probably killed more Jews (the number killed is not known but from 1648 to 1649, the number of Jews in the area decreased by about 50,000 to 200,000, including deaths from disease and imprisonment, according to Wikipedia's entry on Khmelnytsky) than anyone else in eastern Europe did until the German Army

arrived there in the 1940s. As nationalism revives in eastern Europe and new nations there create identities and symbols for their people to rally around, the need to acknowledge the darker side of their heroes, as exemplified by figures such as Khmelnytsky, and their own prejudices against outsiders (fuelled in part by deliberate Soviet policies in the past of diluting ethnic majorities with population transfers from various regions of the USSR and then Russifying the resulting cosmopolitan mixes) seems to be ignored by politicians and their spin doctors.

JENNIFER HOR 22/08/2005
www.supernal.com

Vlad Tepes / Belketre
March to the Black Holocaust
FRANCE TRAGIC EMPIRE REX
TER007 CD (2005)

Two of the famous Black Legions bands of southern and western France, Vlad Tepes and Belketre, released this split CD some time in the late 1990's and now it is available again for those who missed out the first time. If you consider yourself a tr00 and kvlt Black Metallist, well of course you have it already and moreover you'd be treasuring it above life and soul for indeed it is an incredible recording of its kind and were it more widely known it might even be considered a BM classic (to the bands' distaste since they never sought to be all that well known and got cheesed off if they did). From start to finish, this is great French BM, full of energy and raw power and in Belketre's case brimming with hate and evil vibes. If you have an enemy to get rid of, like your boss at work, the ambitious co-worker who steals everyone else's ideas and gets all the credit, or the bully at school or college, why, just place a photo or effigy of the person before your CD player and blast this music away at it and in no time at all (well, it might not happen straight away), your boss will be going on extended leave for an indefinite period, tiresome work colleagues will be kicked to lower positions or will screw up a presentation before the big guns at the conference, and bullies of all sizes and shapes will get their comeuppance, hee hee.

The Vlad Tepes part of the CD (tracks 1 - 8) has an amazingly good sound which highlights this band's style of exuberant, rollicking BM which features a lot of traditional metal guitar solos and excellent spot-on percussion work. The music can be very fast yet flexible in the way music driven by drum machines often is not: fiery and attacking on all fronts, this group would have been a formidable live act. There are many memorable tunes: the first track 'Vladimir's March' in particular seems familiar and could resemble a children's tune though the name of it escapes me. Most songs revolve around war and indeed if war metal featuring lots of lead guitars, melodies, thumping war drums and a raw sound takes your fancy, you'd enjoy this half of the CD.

Belketre's half (tracks 9 - 16) is no slouch either but it's very different: there is a distinctive guitar sound that seems really desolate and the production which is not quite as clear as for Vlad Tepes, gives the music a hissing reptilian edge which complements the alien lizard vokills and the minor chord sequences favoured by the band (both bands by the way were duos at the time of recording). Belketre's music is more a traditional BM style, very raw and not particularly melodic with an emphasis on creating an atmosphere of hate, terror and despair. The drummer attacks his tom-toms with bucket-loads of aggression while whining guitars circle and swirl in an unhealthy life-sapping miasma. One track 'Hate' is an amazing piece: imagine someone has dared to put a mike up close to a giant slumbering tyrannosaurus beast while a doleful organ lullaby keeps the animal in the Land of Nod and this is what you have - quite a corny track, true, but good nevertheless. A stand-out piece is 'Night of Sadness' with strong rhythms, the doleful guitar tone and those inhuman demonic vokillist noises. There is an experimental side apparent in 'Despair', a doomy piece performed entirely on guitar, and also in 'If We Had ...', the weirdest track on the CD, composed of terrible alien voices chanting and echoing one another in a

bastard Cthulhu-derived language.

This CD is truly a BM must-have that covers two extremes of what the genre offers: in one corner is Vlad Tepes's mixture of traditional heavy metal elements with an emphasis on lead guitar runs, aggressive war music and abrasive BM crunch; in the other corner is Belketre's more ambient-directed music that stays close to classic BM primitivism yet is inclined towards unorthodox approaches to constructing and playing music when the need arises and when atmosphere is called for. Depending on your opinion of what BM should be like, you may prefer either band as both offer music of a high and consistent standard: I happen to think Belketre here is the superior band but Vlad Tepes is hard to beat for sheer aggression and relentless attack. I know, I know, these Tragic Empire Rex releases are considered by some to be bootlegs but the CDs I have heard so far seem to be of good quality and apart from the usual hiccups that occur with release schedules and shipments, the label seems reliable enough with deliveries and has a number of distributors in different countries.

A point of trivial interest with these Black Legions / Tragic Empire Rex releases is that the band photos often feature various Black Legions people wielding knives, presumably borrowed from Mütiilation man Willy Roussel's knife collection.

JENNIFER HOR 20/09/2005
Tragic Empire Rex, www.ter666.cjb.net
tragic_empire_rex@yahoo.com

Drudkh

Lebedynyi Shlyakh (The Swan Road)
UK SUPERNAL MUSIC FERLY022CD (2005)

Originally Drudkh was an ambient-directed side project formed by two members of Ukrainian BM bands Hate Forest and Astrofaes but it would seem that with the closure of the Hate Forest project, Drudkh will become the main focus of ex-Hate Forest main man Roman Saenko's continuing explorations of Ukraine's history and culture; certainly this album at least (Drudkh's third) is similar in style to Hate Forest's BM minimalism but with a greater emphasis on melody and Slavic folk elements. Many tracks feature very liquid lead guitar solos and acoustic instruments appear here and there to enhance the music. Track titles refer to significant periods in Ukrainian history (the intro '1648' recalls the year of famous Cossack leader Bohdan Khmelnytsky's revolt against the Polish overlords which led to the establishment of an independent and more or less democratic state on Ukrainian soil for the first time in several centuries) and dwell on Ukraine's constant struggle for freedom and self-determination and the painful price Ukrainians have often had to pay, including famine and near-genocide in the 1930s, in their ongoing quest. Some of the music here seems quite hopeful and even has a superficially jaunty air yet there always seems to be a whiff of foreboding and the feeling that tragedy might strike at any time.

The combination of strong melodies, a high and consistent standard of musicianship, the harsh and minimalist BM aesthetic which helps to create an interesting texture, and the heartfelt emphasis on the nationalist themes and how these direct and influence the music, makes this recording a highly recommended one in the BM canon even if you know or care very little about Eastern European affairs. Everything here seems perfectly balanced with no one element dominating in each song; the music is lean and efficient and the lead guitar solos introduce a folk-oriented emphasis and contrast with the harsh BM rhythms. The final track 'Song of Sich Destruction' (I think there may be a typo and 'Sich' should be 'Such' but I'm not really sure) is an all-acoustic piece sung with clean and surprisingly emotive vocals by Roman Saenko, with lyrics derived from a poem by famous 19th century Ukrainian poet / writer Taras Shevchenko who did so much to awaken his people's national consciousness.

At this time of writing (September 2005), Ukraine was lurching from one political crisis to another with President Viktor Yushchenko sacking the government of Prime Minister Julia Tymoshenko, who incidentally is wanted by Interpol to face fraud charges in Russia, and initially failing to get approval from the Ukrainian Parliament for Yuriy Yekhanurov to replace Tymoshenko, then getting approval in a repeat ballot. As the country sinks into political farce and no-one seems to care all that much about the country's shaky economy and the level of corruption among its political and business elite, to say nothing of the unenviable role Ukraine must play as buffer state between Russia on the one hand and eastern and south-eastern Europe on the other, one can only commiserate with Drudkh at the troubled future of the homeland they so obviously are proud of and want to see prosper.

JENNIFER HOR 23/09/2005
mail@supernalmusic.com
http://www.supernalmusic.com

Antaeus

De Principii Evangelikum
EUROPE OSMOSE PRODUCTIONS OPCD133 - SPV086-08682 CD (2002)

Unlike a number of black metal bands that have been reviewed in this issue, Antaeus is a 'full' band with five members but unlike a lot of traditional heavy metal bands, this group writes quite sophisticated lyrics that revolve around the oppression of the self by traditional Christianity and release from that oppression into Satanic embrace and presumably spiritual freedom and purification via self-mutilation; indeed, an earlier album which some rate as the band's best is quite explicit in its title: *Cut Your Flesh and Worship Satan*. The music itself is raw and brutal with a beefy sound, emphasis on blast beats and strong, militaristic guitar riffing, and deep vocals that actually stand out in the mix as opposed to a lot of BM where the singing usually fights to be heard above the storm. The tracks are all quite fast and short with almost clipped playing so by necessity the lyrics are straightforward and shockingly frank in their apocalyptic vision. As the album is short (clocking in at just under 30 minutes), it's best appreciated in its entirety and the songs (eight in all with an intro and an outro) could be seen as chapters of the one epic.

The music could be described as a mixture of death metal and black metal: the death metal comparisons could be made with respect to the rhythms and the emphasis on riffing at the expense of any melody; on the other hand, the guitars also keep up an ongoing blizzard attack and there are no lead guitar solos. Here is a solid maelstrom attack of hate and loathing aimed squarely at institutional religion with its propaganda that enjoins self-abasement, passivity and acceptance of a highly authoritarian hierarchy thirsty for power and influence but unwilling to be accountable for its actions. W these French BM bands see red when the question of religion and in particular of Roman Catholicism is raised, I know not but the result has helped to give rise to what arguably can be considered one of the best black metal scenes in the world, and moreover one which has become a forum for debating religion and philosophy, in France at least anyway. It may be black metal but what is it the French say? ... plus ca change, plus que c'est la meme chose?

JENNIFER HOR 29/09/2005
www.osmoseproductions.com

TURNTABLiSts ⊙⊙⊙

Christian Marclay
djTRIO
USA ASPHODEL ASP 2023 CD (2004)

A strong set of live recordings from Marclay, this major figure who continues to set high standards for 'art' turntabling. He has successfully negotiated that uncertain area twixt performance and the art gallery, as evidenced by his enormously varied show at the Barbican Art Gallery London this year. Here, he performs in various trio combinations with the musicians Toshio Kajiwara, DJ Olive, Marina Rosenfeld and erikm, all recorded at various art venues and festivals 2000-2003. I haven't many Marclay artefacts in my collection; it's surprising how few records he puts out himself when you consider how many he must own! But the art gallery work also shows a preoccupation with the physical stuff of a vinyl pressing, and the vagaries of sleeve design – both things which he mutates, through smashing, glueing or collage, into something weird and other.

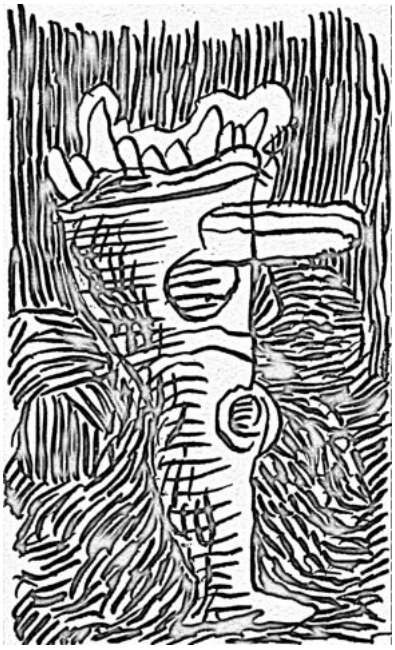
Pretty much the same as what's going down on these performances. All are great, but the longest and best one is the sixth and final cut, taken from the Pompidou Centre 11 February 2000 with Olive and Erik. Packed with ideas and constantly moving, the piece packs in tons of ill-fitting combinations of musical segments, making exciting and jagged shapes. The ghosts of recorded history are pressed into new art forms; all the players show they are extremely sensitive to the timbres and tones of the sounds they work with. Virtually zero interest in the original music's content, or context; just a concern with how they can use the texture of a particular fragment they've found within an LP's grooves.

Some EZ Listening LPs surface among the very varied sounds and cross-rhythms on track 5 – remaking and subverting that genre may be one of Marclay's trademarks, but at least he uses this section of his record collection with intelligence. There's not a trace of irony on any of these cuts, which is refreshing. The 1st and 4th cuts are quite restrained, which may surprise listeners who come to this expecting wild or violent cut-up activity; the former piece has virtually no rhythm or patterns, just a sumptuous sounding abstract collage. The latter uses orchestral and flute recordings, evokes a mysterious feeling with sustained humming and very wayward droning, an effect perhaps produced by varying the turntable speeds. That method is definitely in evidence on track 2, where the rotation goes up to 78 rpm, and maybe sometimes backwards. This one is more agitated than the rest of CD, offering a semi-coherent melded sound-collage where FX pedals and the mixing desk play more of a role. But for the most part, any physical actions or interventions (like scratching or tonearm manipulation) on the part of the players are effaced, untraceable; only pure sound remains.

ED PINSENT 05/09/2005
www.asphodel.com

Gum
Vinyl Anthology. The complete Gum recordings from 1987-1990
USA 23FIVE 005 CD (2004)

We seem to be living in interesting times, where just about every obscure or cultish musical project from the last 20-30 years is being reappraised for its reuse value, and conveniently anthologised or compiled by diligent archivists for this purpose. Sure enough, here comes one I never even heard of before. It's a double-CD set that compiles everything known to have been recorded by the Australian duo of Andrew Curtis and Philip Samartzis, operating as Gum between 1987 and 1990. This was before Samartzis established himself; I gather they were both teenagers at the time. Well, good to hear this as another piece in the jigsaw of turntable experimentation; the only qualm I have with these rescue operations is that there always seems to be some unspoken assumption that everyone's going to be



excited about it; as though there's an expectant audience out there waiting to rediscover these lost masterpieces.

So, do Gum deserve any such accolades? In 1987, these two guys released an LP called *Vinyl*, stating up front their preferred weapon of choice. All sounds on it were made by reusing vinyl records, 'scratched, looped or untouched'. The artistes (who were extremely young at the time) became fascinated with records going wrong, and exploited faults, flaws, warps, and pressing mistakes in the vinyl; and mechanical deficiencies such as wrong speeds, surface noise, and stuck tonearms on their turntables. Similar if not identical territory to that explored by Marclay and Jeck then, although neither of those are namechecked in the notes here, and it seems that Gum arrived at this area of experimentation quite independently, and did it some years before Marclay or Jeck, or Janek Schaefer or Otomo.

That said, *Vinyl* - the entire original LP is reproduced here on CD one – already seems stale and predictable. The variety of sonic textures on offer are at least interesting, but I don't find much imagination or real intellectual content here – just the plodding, dogged exploration of a process. Gotta admit I like the 'ill' sound oozing off some of the queasier tracks, like 'Testicle Stretch' and 'Smooth Torture in Exile'. For the most part though, the duo seem unable to transcend the mechanics of their discovered 'gimmick'. The loopings and stuck-record effects are particularly banal, and contain many gaffes that Jeck would have left on the cutting-room floor without a moment's thought. The sleeve art, depicting cogs and gears, seems to emphasise the mechanical over everything else. Gum pretty much end up as prisoners

of their own device.

One thing much to the credit of Samartzis and Curtis was their eventual rejection of anything to do with 'industrial music', which I suppose in 1987 would have been at some sort of apex in terms of worldwide appreciation, recognition and influence. Their reasons for dissociating themselves from that scene are spelled out in booklet, and are very creditable. And you can guess that at a time when the arena was full of Throbbing Gristle imitators, power electronics masturbators, and lunkheads banging bits of metal around, an LP as idiosyncratic as *Vinyl* might seem pretty distinctive and progressive. Oddly, although they came to hate the wallowing in 'sick' imagery that is such a hallmark of that genre, they themselves couldn't resist inserting a few violent and sick words into their own titles – two examples are stated above, in fact. There's no equivalent violence in the music of the 1987 LP though, which today seems soft-centred, rather silly, and full of half-baked experimentation. A lost classic it ain't.

We're still on CD one; it includes a couple of out-takes from the original LP, and a 21-minute live recording in Melbourne, taken from the exact same period. Unlike the studio work, the live work includes recognisable records (and thoroughly boring ones at that; can you stand to hear the Bee Gees being used without a trace of irony? Or with, for that matter?). Perhaps it's another hallmark of *Vinyl*'s distinctiveness that Gum covered their traces so well, and concealed their source materials. Effectively, though, they only did so by smearing them over with sonic mud.

The second CD brings together assorted works from 1987, 1988 and 1990, showing the combo were already entering an artistic decline after only a few years. These are contributions to compilations (some of which were rejected), and unreleased items. '1-800-GUM' is a total cringe; it's a recording of phone sex, set to a disco beat backing! Sorry, but isn't that just one of the ultimate gaffes? There's a version of 'TV Eye', rejected from a Stooges tribute comp. There's underground hero John Murphy guesting on 'Banning' and 'Blood on the Floor'. The disc also contains their second LP, from 1988, in its tiresome entirety. Admittedly we can hear some progress in the 1990 works; there's a little more clarity to the sounds, a little more precision in their organisation, but it's not the sort of massive improvement likely to convert this listener. Nowadays of course, Samartzis is a well-respected big cheese, so it shows how much I know…

ED PINSENT 19/07/2005
www.23five.org

Still

Remains

USA PUBLIC GUILT PG004 CD (2005)

34 minutes of compressed and intense turntable work from His-Chang Lin, who also appears in the NJ band Dälek on Ipecac Recordings. A superb statement this, which is more like an electronics record than a turntabling one; he uses decks and lots of effects pedals, specifically electronic delay in very large amounts. The selection and use of actual records on those decks is, in the press notes at least, kept under wraps, but there must be vinyl in here somewhere to produce the range of sounds that he does. Turntabling without records takes you into a whole different area, one which Otomo Yoshihide is exploring; that of controlled feedback, or managing a very dry sound of rotating metal. When he does it live, Still has been known to put the stylus in his mouth (as Australian wildman Lucas Abela used to do), and practically everyone who uses turntables as musical instruments finds they have to fall back on the delay pedal at some stage. The question is, what else do you do with your devices?

It's hard not to be impressed by Still's sonic range. The opener, 'Once Confronted', is exceptionally strong – a splendid assault of controlled noise, and immensely satisfying to listen to. When you realise it took the man about two years to generate 34 minutes of finished product, you could appreciate all the more the planning and thought that went into the work. Each sound event seems to be happening via live playback in

the studio, and may appear totally spontaneous; but it's extensively 'mapped out', a strategy that's testament to brain power of Lin and volume of organisational work that takes place in his head, before he even sets foot in the arena.

'Atrophy' contains a pleasing ambient-ish melody and various stuck groove effects. 'A Dream You Were Alive' has two or more contrasting loops and melodies combined with surface noise and fuzz effects to create a glorious, spellbinding effect, filled with much limpid beauty. 'Need' has added voice effects, and it seems even these (using his own voice one assumes) were processed

through the same turntable/FX set-up, rather than overdubbed or recorded separately. By the time you reach this track, you note the CD is becoming more of an ambient murkfest than was suggested by the noisy opening cut, and edging into the dark and fetid urban jungle of DJ Spooky. Not a bad place to be of course. 'Futility' is equally ambient (though in a different way) and more akin to Philip Jeck, in its touching sadness. I make comparisons just to help orientate you as reader – not meaning to say that Still is not original, because there's lots of good ideas here pouring out of his gifted hands. The final cut is called 'Blindness', recorded at a live event, and its gorgeously dreamy texture brings this EP to an end. The opening noisy cut turns out to have been untypical of remainder of CD, but it was programmed to be that way.

ED PINSENT 18/08/2005
www.publicguilt.com

Philip Jeck & Janek Schaefer

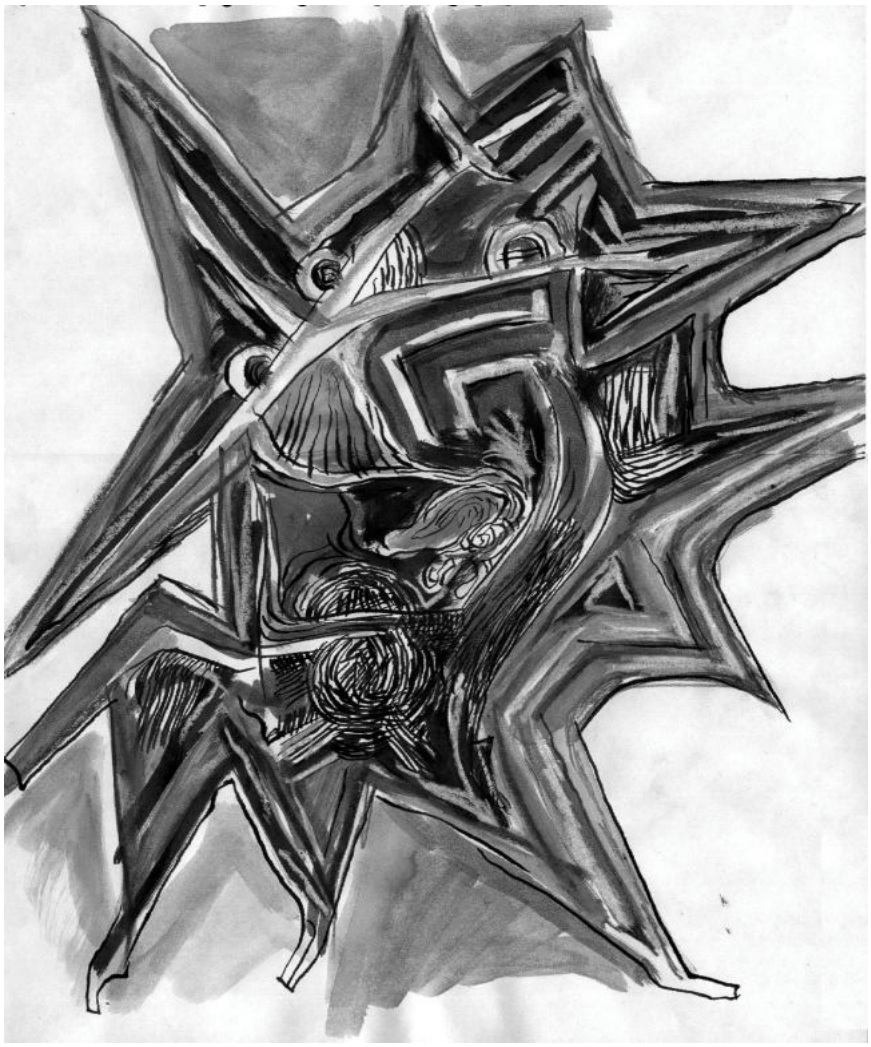
Songs for Europe (Piosenki dla Europy)

USA ASPHODEL ASP 2026 CD (2004)

Jeck and Janek – what a great team name! I think alliterative names should be the exclusive basis for all future avant-garde collaborations. After all it worked brilliantly for Bailey and Bennink. How about Luc Ferrari and Ferran Fages? This CD is pleasant enough listening, but a far from essential purchase. It doesn't meet the high standards Jeck has set for himself, although it might be a progression for him in that it's not based exclusively on turntables and old records, and he's thus moving on from his distinctive soundworld. Schaefer's contribution is not clear to me, but he may be using guitars, samples, laptops. Everything in the finished product merges into a high-sheen, globular, shape-shifting combo of layered sounds fading into one another. There appears to be a vague subtext theme about Europe, but nothing definite is stated in the way of European locations, customs, or politics; instead we have an ambiguous 'travelogue' ambience, suggested by the addition of foreign language tapes and records of foreign pop songs. Seven tracks, recorded in Istanbul and Athens, including titles such as 'Istanbul Drift' and the unfortunate pun 'Acropolis Now'. Has its moments, but ultimately rather aimless.

ED PINSENT 19/07/2005
www.asphodel.com

▲▲ ZANY CUTUPS ▲▲



Gate33

Scribble Season

UK HYPNAGOGIA ago02 3" CD (2005)

I like this one very much. 9 short tracks in 20 minutes on this mini CD, credited to Eve Kharag with editing by pAuLa NoMaLi. Extremely lively and inventive cut-up missives, executed perhaps in the irreverent spirit of Internet bootlegs and mash-ups; 'Edith Gabba' uses up-to-the-minute urban records and crash-collision style edits to grab your attention early on. But then 'The astrophysicist' is quieter, a bewildering collage of documentary voices with an odd computer-generated tune. 'Muck luck' uses primitively buzzing electro-loops puttering away like old car motors, before the track inexplicably turns into a baffling noise barrage.

On 'Carpe Diem', our old friends from the EZ Listening record library appear, but they're deployed in a highly confusing framework, and a song-structure (of sorts) that changes direction on a dime. Gate33

packs a lot of information into a very cramped space, and it's mostly very perplexing information. 'Edit, undo' uses dancefloor beats and squelchy rhythms in a highly imaginative fashion, and further surreal juxtapositions follow. This is quite opaque stuff, extremely hard to figure out what's going on or what is intended, behind the very attractively fragmented surface. Shocking noises may leap out and explode at any turn, and tracks may come to a sudden end after a sudden short fit of activity, without explanation. A fairground ride through someone's very twisted imagination. Recommended.

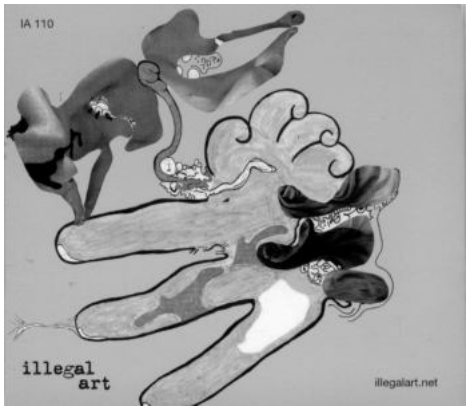
ED PINSENT 27/08/2005
www.hypnagogia.co.uk

Hot Troche

Yopaakuyu With Me

USA ILLEGAL ART IA 110 CD (ND)

Another crazy release on the Illegal Art label, one which verges on the unlistenable. Fragmented, ripped-apart tiny little samples of noise, beats and (sometimes) music, strewn across the void in a frantic fast-moving collage. This record effectively conveys a strong sense of incoherence, and that's putting it politely. At first, it's really hard for a listener to grab onto anything in the flurry of information, because it's all been ground into mincemeat. There's also something faintly repellent about this approach, as though Hot Troche had nothing but contempt for his listener; we may both want the same 'escape' from bland mainstream entertainment, but is this the price we have to pay? If you're prepared to sacrifice your enjoyment factor, and the Bladder Flask record was much too slow-moving for your tastes, then welcome aboard. Music as unprocessed debris...an exciting new approach!



On the positive side, Hot Troche's overall sound-barrage is extremely 'distinctive' (in the same way that taking two tons of hot shrapnel in the face is a 'memorable' experience), and if you can get acclimatised to its pace, it is possible to find an underpinning pattern beneath all the scrads and screes of mosaic garbage. This is a record that I suspect would not have been possible without computer editing – it's just too fast-moving to have been executed by cutting up tapes. Despite use of precision tools, Troche is not into 'timing' to make intelligent or witty observations; he's just out for shock value and startling clashes to give you a bad case of indigestion, information overload, and an excess of horror in the craw in order to make you feel like vomiting. If you're prepared to tackle this aural feast of

filth, by all means join his invitation to 'Yopaakuyu' with him, and dine freely from his proffered garbage cans. Lovely colour sleeve – the painting and collage elements form amorphous shapes, some of which are nearly recognisable and some which have a faintly erotic appearance – a bit like the music itself.

ED PINSENT 27/08/2005
http://illegalart.net

P. Miles Bryson
Megalomaniac Decorator's Quarterly
USA ILLEGAL ART 111 CD (ND)

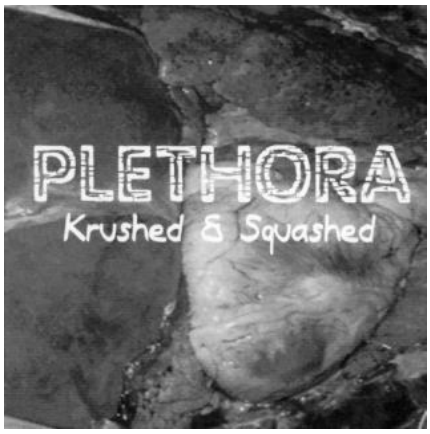
Bring your machete along to cut through the thick layers of irony and double-bluff on this one. Sheesh, what a title! And what a confusing cover too. It's another great item on the Illegal Art label. They have done a couple of comp CDs of material that ingeniously used cut-ups of movies and TV commercials to 'detourn' their original meanings and subtly imply a critique of the very society that spawned them. Bryson, on this highly entertaining record, may not be quite as trenchant as that, but he still manages a very witty form of subversion. He gives us tons of crazy cut-ups and collages made out of lounge jazz, EZ listening, and Exotica records, and pieces them together into brilliantly constructed overlapping layers. The editing work alone is jaw-dropping – he must have spent months getting the timing of everything just right. For the most part, you hear quite lengthy and (in their own contrived way) quite enjoyable chunks of newly-constructed music built out of these old records. What's even more interesting is when it sometimes veers out of control, building up so there's too much stuff to listen to happening too quickly, and it becomes like a lurid ghost-train ride through the Capitol Records 1950s back catalogue.

Bryson's additional tactic is to theme this CD along the lines of an imaginary decorator's catalogue. This is where the project turns really ghastly. Each track title is a lengthy tongue-in-cheek description of some 'fashionable' combination of styles, colours and modes that are completely garish, vulgar, clashing and grotesque. The full-colour artwork is packed with equally tasteless visual samples of same, clipped from old magazines or catalogues. This provides a visual analogue to the music, just to hammer home his point, the full meaning of which will only become apparent to you as you read the printed text inside the booklet. This is a Burroughs-style cut up which clashes extracts from texts by Che Guevara and Adolf Hitler with *Home and Garden* magazine. The idea, I suppose, is that the violent revolutionary and anti-Semitic texts are literally 'papered over' and 'whitewashed' by the blandness of home decorating. Bryson may, by extension, have some implied point to make about his own country's present administration, but this is not stated directly. Actually, with the increase of home improvement shows on TV over here at the present time, this release does seem fairly timely. There's one last further 'gag' from Mr Bryson, and it involves some cleverly concealed unpleasant imagery on the sleeve. I won't give the game away – get your own copy, and a magnifying glass. That said, I think the *Hotel California* LP did it better.

ED PINSENT 31/07/2005
http://illegalart.net

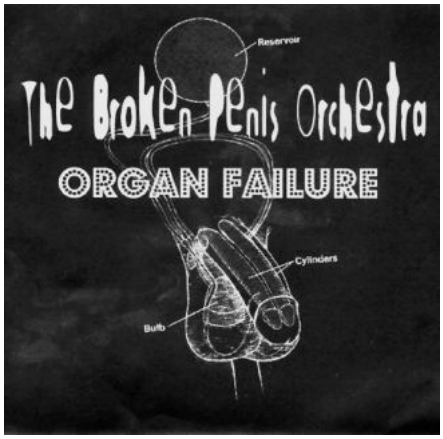
Plethora
Krushed & Squashed
UK HYPNAGOGIA ago03 3" CD (2005)

16 minutes of strange, warped imagination. The cover art features photos of viscera, which may lead you to expect something ghastly and grim; well, it may have its fair share of unpleasant and repellent noise, but there is also evidence of a surreal mind quietly at work. Plethora's work is on label of Paul Coates, who edited same; there is a PsychoChrist connection, and some of the pieces lurch into areas of fast-action cut-up mayhem not unlike that of the Broken Penis



Orchestra. Despite short length of this, it's an always-startling listen. The opening cut is the attention-getter, full of spiteful stabs of nastiness, adding up to a vicious and swinging attack on normality. 'A World Without String is Chaos' is absurd and alarming, but also deeply humourous in its incongruence. 'The Silence in my Head' is anything but silence, on the contrary, though it has more subtleties than most harsh noise records. You kind of admire the way the music keeps changing; shockingly protean, you can't really pin it down, or up. A record of no small intelligence, even when that intelligence is laced with anger, hate and sneering sarcasm. Works from 2000-2002, edited in 2004.

ED PINSENT 19/07/2005
www.hypnagogia.org.uk
www.psychochrist.com



Broken Penis Orchestra
Organ Failure
UK HYPNAGOGIA ogi02 7″ EP (ND)

Yet more cut-up record antics from this increasingly zany-extremo USA combo. *Oral Copulation* was a mini CD also received this ish, which I've rejected as it's just too offensive from the get-go, and very silly also, but this little 45rpm artefact passes muster as it contains healthier doses of the surreal. Said doses may be implanted in a place where you'd rather they weren't, and by a venereal-disease ridden organ, but a dose is a dose, I guess...what you hear is totally incongruous mixes of voices plucked from everywhere and nowhere; fragments of od records, fragments of noise. The A side is just plain insane; the B side has a few sarcastic swipes at rock stars and their preposterous pretensions. 4 tracks, 7" vinyl, 33 rpm, 400 copies; Srad Tene is credited as compiler, with assistance from Dick Flick, and it's on Paul Anomali's label.

I would imagine there's an underlying strategy at work here, an attempt by BPO to distance themselves from anything that smacks of 'experimental' work, as that's simply too bourgeois for them. You see, BPO are clearly interested in what is patronisingly called 'lowbrow' culture or 'populist' sources. In fact anything that's discarded by the rest of society suits them fine, and the lower in the cultural food chain it comes from the better. Plus there's actually quite a narrative approach to the records; despite the surrealism of each construct, there's also an underpinning storyline that can be threaded together – even if it's only on a subliminal 'blipvert' level. Populism and narrative – two of the sworn enemies of the 'proper' electro-acoustic musician, sealed off in their ivory tower of the Academy. If you'd rather breath in the vile stench from the garbage-ridden streets, then check out this record immediately.

ED PINSENT 26/08/2005
www.hypnagogia.org.uk

Wolf Eyes, Fe-Mail, Trencher @ The ICA London

Tuesday 14th June 2005

A sunny day lengthens into a warm and claustrophobic night of tasty noise, all of it so solid and wholesome you could spread it on a fresh baguette in a picnic in the park. The ICA are generally pretty hopeless (aesthetically, organisationally, presentationally), but on this occasion they managed to play host to a great gig. **Wolf Eyes** delivered an effective vision of Hell. They have stage craft, they use lighting, smoke, and most of all a big ugly sound. Sound used as a weapon. They're pounding the listener into the ground, deeper and deeper. They have a lethal suitcase spraypainted with strange markings, which opened to reveal ramshackle workings of home-made electronic devices – like a torturer's case in 1980s CIA operative style. One player wielded a home-made bass guitar, long and phallic and cruel. There were horns and saxes, voices fed through effects as hungry mouths bit the tops off microphones.

Their set opens and closes with the same pounding riff. The audience love this the best – thinking it's a form of Napalm Death hardcore music. But Wolf Eyes confound expectations with their subsequent 'dark ambient' drifting sounds, that are genuinely terrifying. The heat of Hell becomes replaced by the chill of fear, the foggy disease-ridden clouds of Victorian London. Despite a new found arrogance – they strut on stage and spend 10 minutes telling a silly shaggy-dog joke instead of playing, and go for a piss after they've set up…they are doing well. New band member Connelly is on guitar.

Visual cues flashed between band members show Wolf Eyes have a method of organising inherent chaos, thus they maximise effectiveness of noisy blows and buffets. They do it all together, staring and stopping on time. This proves most effective when a synchronised tornado of sound is unleashed as if by stopwatch. They rock!

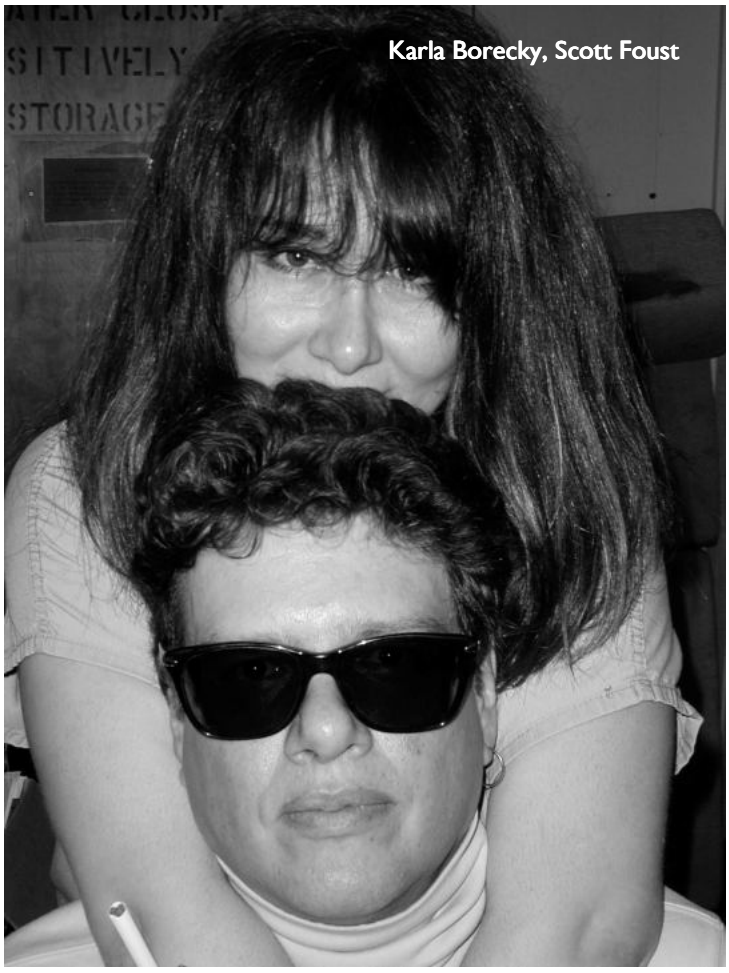
Fe-Mail delivered an effective vision of Heaven. An erotic paradise, that is. They were on before the Wolf Men. They present a stage show of two lovely young Norwegians indeed resembling goddesses, wearing pinstripe suits and ties. They play their table-top noise devices like a game of pub football. Very active – and inter-active. Noise is always sexy – this particularly so. Hard to deny element of voyeurism / lesbian lovemaking going on here. Hard for perverts like me to deny it, anyway! Sonically, they can match Merzbow for fierceness and devastating relentless assault, but they also have more noticeable dynamics. More textures, of volume and shape…organic floating into the ecstatic realms. Wolf Eyes Olson spoke in extravagant terms of the magic and mystery of Woman as he introduced them. This may not be far from truth.

Trencher, who opened the evening, were pretty ordinary but they are a decent UK 'heavy' band. Their use of keyboards was great. Short set – about 29 minutes. A lot of gaps; perhaps they should try and keep momentum going next time. Very good drummer. Flashing yellow skull on stage. A few half-baked Satanic references by singer. Loud and amateurish.

ED PINSENT 15/06/2005

Idea Fire Company

"We Put Out Ideas"



Idea Fire Company comprises Scott Foust and his wife Karla Borecky, but the membership of IFCO as a band is somewhat elastic, as can be seen from the guest members and appearances on the records. At time of interview, two young ex-students were also reckoned as permanent members, although this situtation may be about to change. Scott and Karla also play with Graham Lambkin as Tart; with Mike Popovich as The Pickle Factory; and with Mr and Mrs Borecky as The New Peculiars. Scott has been doing music professionally since 1981. He also operates the Swill Radio record label, mainly to showcase his own releases, but also to support bands he admires, including friends The Shadow Ring.

Of all the above musical projects, the music of IFCO and Tart is extremely hard to pigeon-hole; some listeners found The Pickle Factory slightly more approachable. For this and various other reasons, the work has been largely dismissed or ignored for a long time in the USA. Perhaps they need to aim at a European market. At all events, the music has always followed its own wayward and obstinate path and can't be conveniently aligned with the current burgeoning 'underground' noise, folk, free jazz and psych improv crossover scenes flaming across the USA (and gathering much journalistic interest, including from TSP). This works against them too. Indeed, Borecky (who has had musical training) is less than impressed by the formlessness and directionless nature of much of said music, which she finds self-indulgent and unproductive. Foust likewise regards the profligacy and promiscuity of these 'scenes' with suspicion, seeing it as indicative of a lack of discipline, undernourished by real ideas or thinking.

TSP has long been a champion of Swill Radio records, frequently praising the unusual, imaginative and tightly-edited music, and the obvious thought and care that goes into them. Plus we're suckers for vinyl-only product. If you ever buy a Swill Radio record, you may encounter a number of theoretical and political subtexts in the song titles and published inserts; references to the Situationists, the death of capitalism. You may even be directed to the Swill Radio or Anti-Naturals homepage, where (amongst the bewildering artworks and poetry) you'll encounter yet more polemic – some of it quite forbiddingly intellectual in tone. Like the Anti-Naturals theorising, it is calculated to hit us right where we live, and raise uncomfortable questions about things we'd prefer to take for granted.

This reminded me of something. My old art-school acquaintance (who later become a vegan anarchist) evinced interest in records by Crass around 1981. He pointed out how he thought Crass cleverly 'smuggled' their radical ideas into the mainstream. A punk or music fan might buy a Crass record just because they were punks, or liked punk music; they would open the box set, only to find a lot of anarchist literature within, or mailing lists that could put you in touch with other anarchist contacts. It was as though Crass were using punk music, and in particular the record-buying impulse, as a vehicle for delivering something else entirely. I've never subscribed to the anarchist line of thought, but the means to the end that Crass were using struck me as interesting.

Was Foust doing something similar, I wondered? I tended to assume he was a political radical of some sort, but I was completely wrong. Foust revealed how he hates political art, and stresses his interest is in creating something beautiful. The truth is – and it took Phil Todd to hit me over head to realise it - Foust is an aesthete, and is mainly interested in theory for its intellectually stimulating value. True, Guy Debord may be one of his mentors, but he gets more of a buzz from the humour and self-centredness of said writer than from the critical content. Borecky's motivation is far from political; she too simply loves to make music. Through Foust's influence, she found a way to improve on her grounding in classical music and popular song, extending her imaginative reach into new forms of abstract music.

The Anti-Naturals theory was mainly devised by sociology professor and author Dr Timothy Shortell. Its central tenet might have been better expressed as a positive instead of a negative. Borecky stresses how the theory is not 'against nature'. What it's in *favour* of is people taking responsibility for their lives. The line of reasoning is that most people try and explain away their actions, with resigned statements about the inevitability of 'human nature'. This particularly makes sense in the USA, the country that practically invented blame culture, victim culture, and instant litigation available to all, as an assumed 'right' of citizenship. The UK is ending up the same way unfortunately. Well, do we really want to be a nation of cry-babies who can't wait to bring a legal action against a big corporation the minute we stub our toe in a McDonalds restaurant? Or would we rather act like grownups, and live with the consequences of our actions?

That, I think, is what Anti-Naturals is 'Anti'. It's a model of thinking that reflects the aestheticisation angle too. It might work as an additional dimension to help orientate the listener, rather than a prescriptive set of rules. Foust, never one to sell himself short, would like to place his work in an avant-garde lineage that might include Surrealism, concrete poetry, and post-punk bands like This Heat, Gang of Four and The Pop Group. Both he and Karla seem to be particularly critical, of themselves and their work; Anti-Naturals is simply one more strategy that enables self-improvement, and continual development.

I say all this for the benefit of potential listeners and readers who may have ventured near the IFCO / Swill Radio universe, only to have been put off by these 'difficult' first hurdles. It is possible, if you only read statements on the website, - for example "The total aestheticization of experience requires an ongoing act of the will" - that the whole deal might seem pretentious, exclusive and solemn. Careful listening to the music, however, should reveal where their values really lie: in deep commitment to exploring and playing beautiful music, using imagination and intelligence, trusting in strong band-member interaction, valuing intuition, deploying economy, editing, and a rigourous quality control.

My visit to Swill Radio house coincided with the completion of the movie *Here's To Love*, which Foust soon hopes to make available on DVD. A few months later, Swill Radio was hit by a financial setback which means that the next LP – *Stranded*, by IFCO – may turn out to be the last. This is something which I continue to regard as 'the curse of *Sound Projector*. Don't let me interview you, if you want a career in music! (EP)

Interviews took place 29 –30 April 2005
Location: IFCO headquarters, Amherst, MA, USA

SF = Scott Foust
KB = Karla Borecky
EP = Ed Pinsent

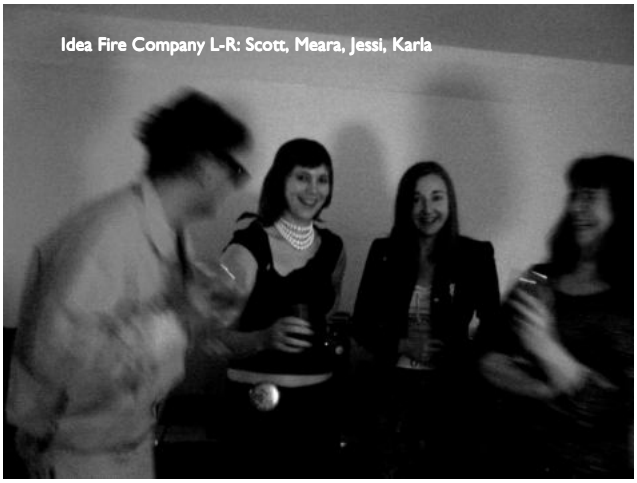
EP Tell me this history of the Idea Fire Company.

KB IFCO started around 1987, 1988. That's when we recorded a lot of [the material]. I'm a little blurry. The first record came out around 1989. We wish now we'd put the dates on the records, because you always think you'll remember and then [you forget]. We do have Scott's list of everything he's ever done. You're an archivist, that's your professional interest! I knew Scott when he was in Anschluss and I actually performed with them once. Carnegie Melon. It was a disaster!

SF I'd got together with Karla by then, and we started the Idea Fire Company. So we did *Explosion in a Shingle Factory*. The first two Idea Fire Company double LPs [were very continuous]. I think the second one's better. *The Fourth Dimension Is Money* didn't really [do well], but I actually sold all of those and I think it's a very good record. Although last time I listened to *Fourth Dimension*, there's only about five minutes of it I would actually take out, so that's not so bad. And then when *Anti-Natural* came out I thought this is such a better record that people will really like it. But it seemed to pick up very poor reviews, it seemed to alienate all the quote-unquote fans that we had. But I think it's a much better record than the first two.

KB The [name] Idea Fire Company actually came from...there was a part of town, one of them had this [sign] that said Ideal Fire Company. I don't know if their L was gone or what, but Scott thought that would be a funny name for a band. Of course, our slogan was 'We Put Out Ideas.' Ha ha ha!

SF In 2002 the membership changed. When Tart started we put Idea Fire Company on the back burner for a little while, and I just didn't really think we could do a record that was as good as *Anti-Natural*. So we had Jessi Swenson and Meara O'Reilly perform as guests at a show once. And it worked out so well that we started working on recording new material. And so now the lineup, at least


Idea Fire Company L-R: Scott, Meara, Jessi, Karla

Idea Fire Company L-R: Scott, Meara, Jessi, Karla

for this moment, is a quartet with me and Karla and Jessi and Meara. Karla and Jesse play synths, Meara plays a keyboard, and I do radio and tapes. And the girls all sing.

KB Right. We had one of our Anti-Naturals nights and I played with Jessi and a friend that night. I played the guitar, and I like finding something repetitive and trancey. I took guitar lessons, but that was a while ago. I know how they work and that the frets are half-steps, but I just pretty much [stop there]. There was something about when Jessi and I played together. She was also playing in a repetitive way. We really played well together. We knew Meara was interested too. So I guess Scott thought it would be fun to have a band with three women. But also I knew we could do vocals together. Which I really liked, and [whereas before] usually I would have to record all the parts, having other people who could sing them at the same time really opened it up. I liked that. I think they like it too. Meara had piano lessons. She's a more melodic person. What we do is divide them up into the melodic versus the non-melodic, [depending on] backgrounds. It was a unique combination and we really thought they had good sensibilities, like they understood the thing where everybody's playing a part.

EP So everybody in the band is clear they have a role to play.

KB That's right, and nobody's trying to stick out like the big star and poke out more than anybody else. And so everybody brought their own little thing to it. Meara has a number of weird musical instruments, she has little funny keyboards and she has a set of tuning forks. They have good sensibilities, and I really liked adding the vocal dimension to [the music]. I look at it as just another sound. I've even thought about talking with them about recording harmony things together. I love Anonymous Four. And I've always loved that kind of layered harmony part work music. It does look impressive [with four band members] ...and here's the other funny thing, when we played the first show. I usually sit down to play. But at this one show, there were no chairs or whatever, and it just came out that we had to stand. I was nervous about it at first. But it really changed the way people [in the audience] reacted to us. It was like they took us more seriously, when were standing there, it gave us more authority or whatever. There are so many performances where people are just sitting down and noodling away. And even though we're sort of noodling, it looked very majestic. We played this show at Hampshire, and there was this

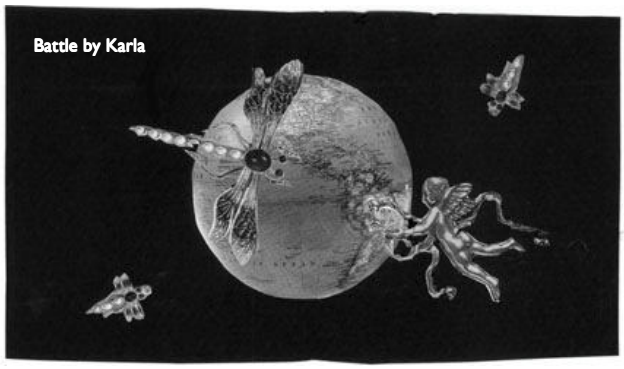
great big glass, a wall of windows behind us, so we were lit up from behind. I guess it looked very impressive!

HOW MUSIC GETS MADE – TART and IFCO

EP What would be the starting point in the process of realising a piece of music?

SF It's not always the same. One thing it depends on is what the group is I'm working with at the time. With Tart, we played a lot together early on, and developed. The first album was a wide-open thing, where we wanted to leave ourselves lots of room to explore different directions further up down the road. So we tried to put a bunch of disparate material on [that album], *Radio Orange*. And by the time of *Bring In The Admiral* we had played a fair amount of live shows, and played together a lot. And Graham and Karla and I really settled into a niche of what we'd each do. And that's the only band I would play with now without a rehearsal, because I feel real comfortable.

KB When we first started, because I was just kind of raw, and Scott he would say 'I want something to go with this'. He would have a piece he'd recorded or he would say something with a vague guideline, and I would listen to it and noodle around, and come up with something I thought went with it. Then record it. So that was how we started. And then, [increasingly], I would start things – like for instance in Tart, I get a little vocal sample on the little Casio keyboard. Then I'll play it on a loop or repeat it. Sometimes it's kind of embarrassing, cause I would just pick up the keyboard and put my mouth up to it! If I had a microphone it would be so much less embarrassing! Especially because I don't want people to hear the little sound I'm making. I feel that takes away from the magic of it. Then later on, I accidentally managed to sample something that had a little ambient sound of the room, like a click or maybe there was a piece of Scott's guitar. I like to set up the rhythm. And then I play it in different keys. The thing about the Casio, the higher you go, the faster it repeats. So it mirrors the pattern, the frequencies of the keys, so if I do an octave then it's exactly twice as fast. And I then know that if I put those together it'll match the pattern. Plus it changes the note as well, because it's a higher-pitched thing.


Battle by Karla

SF With IFCO, half the material on the records was [derived from] band get-together, messing around, finding bits that are good. And there's some tape work There are many ways. I don't really have a set process. It's the people, it's more about the people. That's what I really love about music. It's a really interesting way of interacting with people, nothing else is quite the same as that. Which of course is good if the people are sensitive and interactive, but bad if they're just egotistical and try to show off or be loud or whatever it is.

EP When recording, is everything improvised, or are any plans made?

KB Yeah, we sort of [improvise]. What we do is we improvise to find something, and when I find something good I play around with it. I know Scott always hated playing with [proper] musicians, because they can't really *get it*, you know? With IFCO when we first did it, some of it [was improvised]...there's one side of a record where's it's almost all this keyboard thing that I made up as I went along. But I do repeat patterns within it, it's not all [free improvisation]. Sometimes we work things out ahead of time. Like with Tart, we'll come up with [a plan]...each person has a thing they're gonna play. Within that structure, we all do the thing where we're gonna repeat and do variations. It's disciplined, it's not like everyone just does their own thing. Occasionally somebody else will throw in something, especially Graham or Scott, they'll throw in a little dramatic [shape] or whatever. And I'm always [very dismissive]! None of that for me, you know! But that's good. That's their thing, it's not my thing. It's not conventional improvisation really. It's only improvised when we first figure out what we're doing. We always kid about it, that if we make a mistake, we'll just repeat it! Hit a sour note, then just hit it again! Because then it sounds more purposeful!

EP Do you know about musical theory, chord structures...?

KB Yes, but I just use that as a tool. I try sometimes to tell other people who don't know [these things], you can just give them hints about what kind of things go together, because I know...and they can either use that, or they can use that in a negative way. You know, the [conventional] expectation would be that you would do this, this chord would go with this, but they do something else.

EP Did IFCO onwards open up a new avenue of expression for you?

KB Oh, it did. Oh, absolutely. When Scott would play things for me, it was good, because it broke this little bubble I was in. That I enjoyed, but I couldn't really create within it. I took things that I knew that I liked the way they sounded, and I had a way to use them in a different way. The building blocks that I had, I had a way to put them together that before, I didn't. It was very amorphous, and this crystallised it for me. I realised that, if you only hear typical kinds of song structures then it's not really on your radar, all this kind of odd music.

EP The interesting thing about the dynamics of the various groups, and I realise it depends very much on the people involved, but it's not like the dynamics of an ordinary band. It's almost like someone has sat down and reinvented what a band could be.

KB I think it's like when Graham and Scott and I came together, when we all met up. We played a radio show and Graham played with us, and that's how [Tart] came about. We decided we were going to record and have a new thing together. So I think it was something that we each came to on our own. It's sort of an odd combination...you're improvising, but really within a very strict [framework]. Each person has their own little set of rules for whatever it is they're playing, I feel. We don't really talk about it, it just happens. We've had times where one person was way too loud. But we're not gonna be rude and say Shh! And sometimes it will have gone on a little long and Scott will chop it off. We really try to do repetition things, so in that way it's more like a song [than an improvisation] I think. But we don't really talk about it much.

EP I think there's a lot of bands would give their eye-teeth to have that kind of rapport.

KB You think? You know, a friend of ours said when they were with Harry Pussy that everyone in the band was constantly screaming at each other. To them, that was part of the process of coming up with the song, was everybody screaming and fighting!

SELECTION AND EDITING

EP I've always felt that the quality control of the finished product is a point of pride with you.

SF Yes, and you're absolutely correct. Because I don't really like the idea of tons of releases that come out. I always like to say that Beethoven couldn't make six good LPs in a year, much less someone else. I think a lot of people would do a lot better if they were a bit more selective about putting their releases together with care. Often you hear an 80 minute CD, and you know there's 20 minutes of material that if it were organised better it would be fantastic. But it isn't! I don't record all that often. I don't like having things that are great sitting around that I have no way to release. It's not good to sit in there every day and plunk away, because I think you develop habits. And I love letting it sit, like letting IFCO sit for seven years. We did these sporadic live shows now and again but mostly let it sit. That has a really positive effect. I've never been a good musician, really. I wouldn't say I could play any instrument at all.

EP I notice you don't release absolutely everything you record by any means.

KB It's funny you should say that, because I would [like to record more]. We do have [unreleased] material that we've recorded. Scott, his feeling was he doesn't like to record anything until (a) the other thing gets put out and (b) if it's not for a specific thing to be put out, he doesn't like to just noodle around. Partly I think the reason we don't put out as much is because I work, and some of the work I have to do for the records, so the amount of time I get to devote to that work sometimes gets limited. And it's partly money, too. A lot of those [other] people are just constantly recording and putting out every little thing that they play. I don't really like that. We always say we don't think every single note that we record is good.

EP One of the things I've noticed in the back catalogue of your records is the very deliberate editing and selection of music.

SF The real selection [process] is recording stuff and listening back to it a lot, and try to figure out what's good and what works and how to edit it. One of the things I'm really concerned with is the pacing of LPs. I think that's another area people really neglect. They'll just throw stuff on in any sort of order. It just doesn't seem to make sense. One of the things about *Anti-Natural* and *Radio Orange*, *Bring In The Admiral* and *Stranded* that I'm really happy with is the sequencing. And I'm not saying me personally, there's a lot of band input too, but there's almost more time spent on that than spent on the actual playing. Listening, selecting, putting things in the right order, and saying maybe this certain piece doesn't work, is there some way to make it work? Is there some bit of it that could be used for something else?

EP And is that process just done by you?

SF No. I do the nuts and bolts, the dirty edit tape work...not entirely, because Graham does it as well. But also all of that is talking about the music with the people in the band. With Idea Fire Company, I'm working the knobs, but I wouldn't say it's all sprung from my mind, no. The idea of having a group is having as much group interaction as possible.

EP And there is one particular record, *Anti-Natural*, where it seems like there's a complex hidden structure on side one, where if you listen to it enough you can tell that there's repeated sections...

SF Yeah, there are. And that was just a lucky accident! There's a lot of really short pieces that are very similar, that I used as buffers between the other tracks on the LP. When I first put it together I was just messing about. I was just so excited because they're very short and they made the other tracks seem very long and spacious, and I thought it really pulled that record right together, from just being another droney synth record.

KB We just played for a long time. Then we thought it would not have been good as a single piece. So just chop it up! And we gave each [section] a different name. Graham noticed that it's actually all part of the contiguous piece.

EP That's the record that made me think, as some music does, that it's possible to contain a tremendous amount of information within music.

SF In a very subtle way, yes. I do that a lot, and I'm not really sure if anyone ever notices, but I notice, and people, friends of mine notice, so...that's good enough.

KB I think the only problem is the first thing you hear on the record is that crazy whooping thing. I told Scott, I like starting with this but I think it's gonna put people off it. I thought if anybody listens to this, they're not gonna wait to get to what I consider to be the pretty parts, because they're gonna hear that and think 'oh, no!', And this is why Scott called that one 'On Your Toes Intellectuals'.

INSTRUMENTS AND METHODS

EP What instruments do you play?

SF I've had a Korg, an MS 10, since my first band, which started in 1979. I probably got the Korg in 1980. I've just had the same equipment all these years. And especially with analogue synthesizers, the longer I've had it...I can always find something new with it, and that's really nice. So I've never really bought

Scott in performance mode

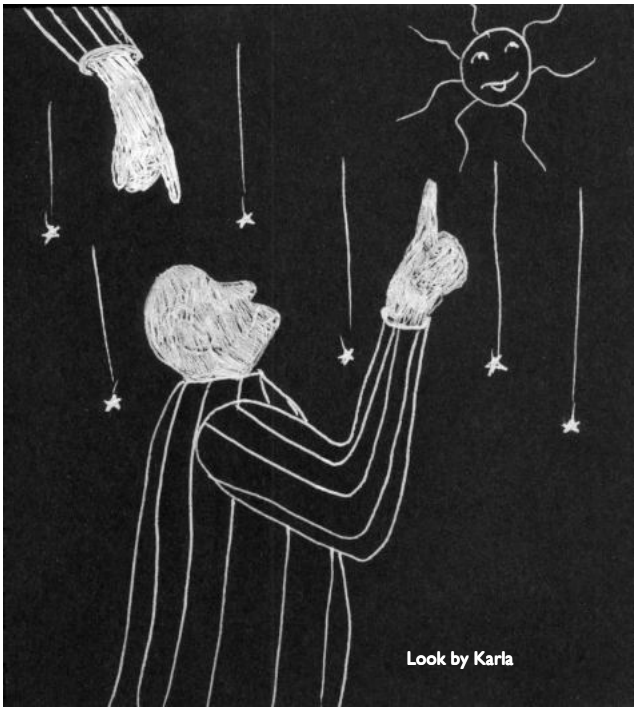
another one. And they're so expensive. I think it's better just to get to know your instrument. If you just keep at something, keep trying to find things, you get a lot better results, than always getting something new and turning the dial. And then you just end up having the same sound that's on everyone else's records because everyone else is buying the same new gear. I'm not even sure what that Korg [can do] – I don't sit and play it every day, but I still sometimes will turn a knob or put a patch in and – ooh, I've never heard that before! And that's why I really like those analogue synthesizers, because to me they're always surprising.

KB A lot of the times I play keyboard. I was trained and I took piano lessons, and I had keyboards from when I'd played in bands when I was a youngster, cover bands. But then when I met Scott I realised playing something that was more unusual would fit better with what I [already] knew how to do. Which was nice. Before, I felt like I had no talent! In the Idea Fire Company I have an RMI keyboard computer, it's a multiphonic keyboard. It takes punchcards. I played that on a lot of the [records], the big organ sounding thing. The music that sounds like Krautrock, but the thing was I hadn't really heard Krautrock, so I didn't know! It was a combination of [things]. I knew classical music, and I studied with a piano teacher who was a jazz guy, so I learned all the different chord combinations. I guess I'm more like the melodic person, and Scott would add in the non-melodic or odd touches. That's what a lot of our patterns are. Although lately I do occasionally play the more sound-scape kind of thing. But more often I play a pattern. One time a drummer friend of ours said to me that he thought for Tart I was like the drummer. I like to find a repetitive melodic pattern. I like to produce a trance-like thing now, I like to find something that I find interesting or usually pretty, but also hypnotic almost.

SF There's a lot of tape manipulation stuff, but the way we do it is all very primitive really – and this goes for the IFCO records and Tart records as well. Taking a tape made on a four-track and playing it on a regular tape machine so it's half the speed. We don't really have fancy digital editing gear or anything, it's just very

primitive. When you have limits on yourself, you're really forced to work harder. And think more. All art could use more *thinking*! Thinking about what it's supposed to do. I just don't believe in that [idea] where it just shoots out of you, and there it is. The more you're limited by not having so many options, so you have to explore the options you have deeper. You really have to work hard to try to get something out of them that's good. I think that's always helped me a lot.

KB Two friends of ours had this conversation...one thought that if you have a limited thing that you can work with, that it makes you more creative. Whereas the other thought he wanted to have whatever percussion things you could possibly think of that he



might want to use them at a certain show, he wants them all there. Scott said about the XX Committee that their biggest influence was their lack of equipment. I think that's true.

SF With us, it's all very hands-on. We don't have very much equipment. Karla and I have like two or three synthesizers, a couple of guitars and a couple of amps, Casio keyboards...but it's not like huge banks and walls of electronics and stuff. I know Graham uses much less equipment than I do. He barely uses anything for those Shadow Ring records.

THE AUDIENCE

EP Your music is very hard to pigeon-hole. Sometimes it seems that audiences can't quite get the hang of what to make of it, how to process it. Do you have any sense of an audience engaging with the music?

KB One of the best times we played where people actually seemed to get it was at the Middle East Cafe in Cambridge near Boston. A lot of people sat down, people were swaying a little bit, which was what I think when I listen to our music, when it's going good it's hypnotic, and engaging. That's one of the things I like about music, I like it to absorb me to the point where I don't really think about [it] being a record. And it doesn't have to necessarily be repetitive, any kind of good music to me is like that. You're just caught up with it. So that [show] was really neat, because people really seemed to get it. Now there are other times when we play, sometimes with noise bands, and I think that maybe they thought we weren't noisy enough. If we play for people who were there because they want to see one of those improv bands where the members change all the time, I think they think we're too boring. 'Cause we're repetitive, we're not all jamming or whatever! (laughs) I've enjoyed listening to some improv shows, especially when there's just a few people, but even though you would say that they're always different, to me they all sound the same. It's like a blur of different sounds, there's nothing that gives it a structure, and so in that there's nothing to grab onto. So undifferentiated. You can't remember, you can't repeat any of the music in your mind of what you listened to that really struck you. You can remember that they really built up at one point and got really big and they came down, but there's no real musical impact on you.

EP So there are all these musical modes going on in the contemporary underground, and you don't really sit alongside any of them very well.

KB I know, but it works against us in some ways, because I think if people can't put a label on it or somehow categorise it or decide whether it's important or not, then we get ignored. By the same token, it's probably just as well. I think we're not trying to do music that's "original", we just do music that we think sounds good. It's the same problem if you're trying to sound 'weird', then it's just ridiculous.

THE SHADOW RING AND GRAHAM LAMBKIN

EP I think the *Lighthouse* double LP is one extraordinary record in the catalogue...

SF Oh, that was fantastic! It's really a Shadow Ring record...we sent them tapes of material, but Graham and Darren put that together for the most part. I think had we not been separated by geography, we might have worked on the music together.

EP When did you meet Graham Lambkin?

SF It was when *Put The Music In It's Coffin* came out, and I was just so excited by it, I just thought it was fantastic! So I wrote him a fan letter and sent him a copy of *The Fourth Dimension Is Money*. He wrote me back. And oddly enough, he already had *The Fourth Dimension Is Money*. But he gave the copy to Darren, and we started talking and seemed to have a lot in common. He's a very interesting artist, and we both have a lot of different ideas that have helped each other. It's been very good knowing him. After he and Adris [Hoyos] got married he moved to Miami, and then he was a little more accessible. He'd come over once from the UK, I think that's when the first Tart record might have been made. Meeting him was very inspiring, he's a very talented artist. Very very good.

EP What is it that he actually does, in terms of the noise and music that he makes? He writes the poetry, doesn't he?

SF Yeah, he does the lyrics, and he does a lot of mixing, and field recordings. There are some instruments on the newest LP, *I'm Some Songs*, but a lot of tapes, and changing speeds of tapes. One of the things I liked about [him] when I met Graham was, it was obvious when I met him that he had [depth]. I don't really like sloppy, messy music at all, and you could tell from early on that The Shadow Ring had much bigger concerns than just messing about in the basement and making music. That's why we became friends so easily and quickly. I think The Shadow Ring's records show, much better than my own music, progression. If you look at them from *City Lights* [onwards], in every record there's more of something, less of something else. None of their albums are the same at all. Yet you could pick them out as The Shadow Ring immediately, and isn't that a feat! I think that's really [important].

THE NEW PECULIARS

EP Karla, your parents have been on one or two of the records. What's the story behind that?

KB The New Peculiars. You know, I'm not even sure how it got started. My dad, he played the violin when he was a kid. And my mom of course, she took piano lessons. I'm sure it was something Scott thought up, but he decided we were gonna do this anti-rock band. It was just an anti-everything sort of style. Scott said it was funny because it's crazy to be in a band where he's the most proficient one on his instrument! Because I was playing drums, and I think I have a pretty good sense of rhythm but I'm really bad at anything complicated because I just haven't practised. And my mom was playing keyboards, which she sort of knew, and my dad was playing his violin. But the funny thing was even though my father seems like he's the [straight] one – my mother is the more eccentric one, and my dad is more the one who comically rolls his

eyes about anything weird. But he actually got it! It was funny. He was playing his violin - at one point, you can hear it on the record, Scott and everybody are going 'Rhoo! Rhoo! Rhoo! Rhoo!' at the same time, and my dad joined in with them! I mean, I was in stitches! And my mom was in her own little world...everybody else was done, and at one point my mom was still noodling around, and not noticing that everybody else has stopped. So I took my drumstick and tapped on her keyboard! (Laughter) 'We're done now!' It was a lot of fun! We had two or three singles and Graham did the cover for two of them. I knew my parents would get a charge out of it, because my mother, one of the things that makes her laugh is when someone's singing off-key, especially if they're doing it on purpose to be funnier.

PERFORMANCE ART

EP Scott, can you tell us about these two new performance art things you're doing?

SF Yes, I originally started calling it sound poetry, but it's almost more like a theatre performance thing as much as it is sound poetry. It happened because a friend of mine asked me to a birthday party and he was having some people perform. So I worked out one piece, called 'Sorry to hear about your collapse', which is a dynamic sound-poetry piece. I use tapes too, it's not just me [talking]. And then I came up with another one called 'Der Saufel', which is German for 'The Drinker'. I'm really happy with that one. There's a third piece, a lecture piece, there's just tapes and I just sit there. And I've done three or four [performances]. I found it very enjoyable to show up at a show with only having to being a microphone and a tiny tape machine and not having a band. That's easy.

EP Could you describe the drinker piece for our readers?

SF I did a tape collage of piano bits from some [German] Lieder and sounds of corks being pulled from bottles, and ice going into glass. And for the piece, I just basically pour myself a glass of whisky and have a drink and play the tape, and sit there and weep for about eight minutes. It is only eight minutes long, but I've had people say that it seems like it's twenty! When I did the show at the Yod shop, it was really funny because it was the first time I'd done that piece. And I've never seen the life sucked out of a room so effectively! Because the first piece is pretty dynamic and somewhat humourous, I think, at least it's up-tempo and has some changes in mood. With this second piece, people were expecting something likewise would happen, there'd be some sort of punchline. But three minutes in, everyone started to sense that nothing was gonna happen, except the weeping! I have to say it was one of my most interesting experiences performing.

CRITICAL ART

EP I think also there's a content to your work that appears to be quite critical, critical of things as they are in the world today. Which may be imparted through your sound, making the listener feel uncomfortable, perhaps prompting the listener to think about certain things.

SF Yes, that's certainly true...I really think that I like art to be beautiful. Beautiful might not be the right word. I believe it has the power to do something, and I also believe that the world is in very very poor shape. And so I really can't do much – I mean, making a record, let's face it, isn't gonna do anything. But it's all I can really do! I look at my work as being directly [within] a modernist avant-garde lineage. What I like to try to do is tie the records in, in some way. I have the group the Anti-Naturals as a sort of avant-garde group, and records, and films, and writing, and I like to have all this be part of a whole. It all goes together. And as a critique of society, sometimes the way art is presented in society. But not hectoring people. I mean, my writing can be that way. I don't like political art at all! I think it's horrible! You're dated as soon as soon as you come out the window. I am after maybe making people see that the world doesn't really have to be the way it is. So many things that people take for granted don't really have to be that way. And sure, the music may not by itself give anyone that impression. I don't know if it does or not. But I think with all the things together, it makes a picture. There's more and more of it, however deeply you want to get in, there's a sort of unity. Maybe that's what you were talking about before, when you said how the music seemed unsettling. I try to have a unity of things.

EP I agree that there's no hectoring content in your music.

SF I understand the idea that maybe there's some issue right now that I feel needs to be addressed, but in a lot of ways that sort of thing is really a halfway measure. It isn't that these issues have appeared this minute. The problem is the entire organisation, the entire structure, reality, the way the world works today. I always find this with left-wing things. Oh, they'll pick an issue, but they won't critique Capital. Nobody [does]. In the US, you do not critique Capital. Or Religion, ever. It isn't gonna change the decay of the world in any way shape or form, to a big enough degree that it makes really any difference. At least I don't think so.

EP So would it be fair to say, you'd rather try and address the wider and deeper issues?

SF I believe that revolutionary ideas have to have revolutionary content, or presentation. In other words I don't believe folk songs about the problems in the world are really [valid]...they're missing the boat entirely. You have to go all the way! And if you really want to build a new world, you have to build a new world! (*Laughter*) Well, that's easy enough now!

KB I think It's like a writing teacher I had once who said 'it's OK if your story has a moral, as long as none of the characters know about it!'

THEORY

EP You both have these interests in many layers of ideas, yet the music is all instrumental. If it weren't for the song titles and if you didn't read the inserts...

KB That's true. I don't feel people should really have to need to read that. That's all Scott! (Laughter). I guess in some ways I'm really a verbal person, but when it comes to music I can't really put things into words that I can in music. Just because it seems to actually express it in words would seem to trivialise it, like writing a good poem I mean. I have written poetry and it's always maybe too [obscure], beating around the bush and too cryptic. I'm very allergic to too much explaining.

SF I honestly find my records very attractive to listen to, so I don't really think I'm saying you have to know a lot of philosophy to understand these records, or be some sort of intellectual. Although I think everyone should strive to be intellectual in some [capacity], to be smart, because it's better to be smart than not. I don't like anti-intellectualism at all. Nor do I like stuffy, annoying intellectuals! Stupidity, that's the worst. You don't have to hear every record I've made to understand. It's not necessary, one is fine. I think you can still get something out of it. Maybe you can get more out of it if you know all the work, but there's certainly a lot to get out of it on its own.

EP There's no escaping your interest in the work of Guy Debord.

SF. Yes, I found him to be a fascinating character and an excellent writer. I actually think his writing is very humourous. It's so self-centred. I enjoy his style...the content is great. And of course, this makes Guy Debord's ashes turn in the Seine or wherever he is! He's sort of pompous. Leaving a lot of gaps. When I'm writing I write the same way, I don't like explaining things too much. Put down a few things and let the person [reader] make the connections. Because that's how you learn. You never learn when things are just told to you and you just accept them, that's not the way to learn anything at all.

EP Can you summarise some of the main points of interest in Debord's philosophy?

SF The concept he's always associated with is the society of the spectacle, meaning that everything belongs to this same huge world, and unless you realise the totality of this, you're really just spinning your wheels if you're trying to figure out solutions to the world's problems. That's the concept. A lot of people will [interpret this] in a simplistic way – you know, the mass media and all this, but it's really everything. But there's lots of [other] interesting ideas in the [work of the] Situationists, and it wasn't just Debord either, although I think he's certainly the best writer of the bunch. He

always talked about the supercession of art, that you couldn't really do art now because it's just part of the spectacle. Until the spectacle has been recognised and broken, you can't do art. But in fact, he did a lot of art. Films, and I consider writing to be art as much as music or films.

THE SWILL RADIO RECORD LABEL

EP What are the practical difficulties in running your own record label?

SF I suppose there wouldn't be practical difficulties if I sold some records so that I could make the money back, but distribution seems to be getting harder and harder to find. That's a world-wide problem. At one time I thought that one of the things was gonna be that no-one would buy vinyl any more, but that isn't the case at all. But distribution's hard. It's so much work that, to me, isn't art. I'm a terrible businessman. And I'm not an oily seller character in any way at all, so I'm just not very good at running a record label. And the real problem is the money, because there just never is any, so it's basically how long is it gonna take [to get a release out], that's why there hasn't been a release for so many [years]. But now we have *I'm Some Songs* and *Stranded* coming out, which is nice.

EP Who else has been on the Swill Radio label?

SF We did a Kjetil Brandsal LP. He's Norwegian. A very nice record. He's Noxagt, he had a number of projects. There was a time when I wanted to branch the label out and start doing a lot of other people's work. It seemed like this is probably a good way to get the label [noticed]. We started a series of Ralf Wehowsky reissues of cassettes, and of course unfortunately the money just hasn't really been there so now the third volume's been passed off to another label. I'd really rather run the label than run the distribution, but it didn't really pan out. So there will be another Tart double LP, and I don't think there'll be another Shadow Ring LP, and maybe another Idea Fire Company, I'm hoping to do some recording this summer. Personally, as long as I can have control over what the packaging looks like, I'd much rather have someone else put out the record. I'd be much happier, not having to deal with the business side of it in any way, shape or form.

EP But don't you find running a label gives you a certain control and creative independence?

SF I speak harshly of running the label, but actually I do like it. And one of the things I've really enjoyed is I've met lots of very nice people, through the post and stuff. This is another great thing about being involved in music, because I've met so many that it makes it very worthwhile. All the good friends I have, almost, I've met through music, or art or writing. So I find that to be a very good thing – bringing like-minded people together. And I'm also very big on dialogue. I just think that's the way to learn more about your own position, by having discussions with people. I love that sort of thing. At the same time I've never felt really part of any sort of scene, or a community outside of my own. Perhaps that's one of the reasons the records don't sell so well. I don't really think there's a bin that's current that you could throw any of my records into and say it's that. Drone music, trance music, hip-hop or whatever it is. I think it's a strength, but sales-wise I suppose it's a difficulty.

EP At one stage you would only work in vinyl and tape issues.

SF Yes, once. I would do a CD now. The Pickle Factory came out on both vinyl and CD, that seemed like a disaster. I would do one on the label if there was a project that seemed like it needed a CD. I used to be fairly anti-CD, as some people might know, but I'm not so much any more. I still think records [sound better]. I think they learned to make CDs sound very good now, but still – CD covers will never be album covers. I like [album covers] as an art object.

EP Some thought does go into your packaging.

SF Karla's done most of the covers and she's very good at it really. We've put a lot of thought into all the material [processes]. It's easier to do that when you don't have a release coming out every month. Of course you can't spend as much time with the packaging, and with the material.

KB I've had drawing classes, and I was OK at it, but because of my problem of not practising I think drawing real things is something that takes a long time for me. So I tend to do more abstract patterns. Probably what I should do is design fabric or wallpaper, just repeated designs! I don't know how I got into doing [the covers]. I did do a newsletter for work, so I fell into doing the graphic design-y sort of thing. Layouts I probably learned from doing that newsletter. I learned about PageMaker and different things. Partly because I was the computer person in the family. The very first IFCO record, I had a friend help me, but I just learned about it perforce. You get the dimensions from the people who are gonna make the cover. I just lay out different things and started doing more and more with the graphics. It's all based on instinct. Just muttering along and figuring it out. [Choosing] colours that appeal to me. The idea for the front of the Anti-Naturals cover, that was Scott's idea, the purple one. Then I did the back with the repeated mirror-image photographs. I just fell into it. The Ralf Wehowsky ones, I did those. Those are all weird things based on his initials. It has that fake Mondrian [feeling], the colours are like Mondrian. I don't know if they're any good or not, but there you have it.

IS ANYONE STILL LISTENING

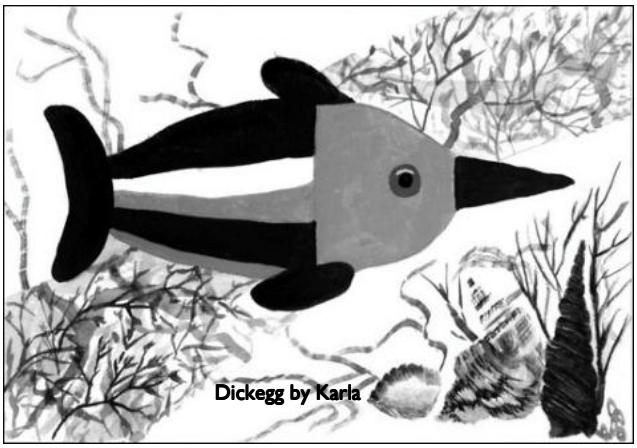
EP Over 20 years, do you feel the audience or market for your music has receded?

SF It's hard for me to say, but I would say possibly not. It might be about the same. There are still people who like good music, but I think in the late 1970s and early 1980s, at least from a personal standpoint, there was a lot more optimism that things were [improving]. I was very attracted to the post-punk movement, especially in UK bands. [There was a hope that] things were really turning around and music was really gonna [succeed]. Punk music in general, and more importantly post-punk, where they used lots of things that didn't have anything to do with rock music. Different ways of organising songs, not rock ways of organising songs, and tape techniques...dub was very influential for a lot of these people.

It was a very creative time, very inspiring, made you feel [hopeful]. I'd go to a record shop every week and come back with records that were really fantastic, and you really thought this was gonna go on forever. I thought! And then it all just fell apart, which was very depressing. Another reason I thought it was such an interesting time, people all seemed interested in all sorts of art... when you read interviews with the bands they would always talk about books and movies...and good stuff, not like crap, but good ones! Go-getters, they could turn you onto [new things]. I love to find out about things.

EP Do you also think the music might have influenced other things?

SF Yeah, it seemed like [the whole] culture was gonna be influenced. And I don't think it really was at all. This was one of Debord's things about how everything just gets absorbed, it doesn't really matter [any more]. Like art, everything will get watered down and turned into something it really wasn't, and sold. And that will be the version that everyone actually hears, not the real version. Debord's idea was that even if something revolutionary started to get some attention, it just becomes part of the very thing it hates, right away. Or in fact by definition it is,


Dickegg by Karla

because nothing can really be outside of the spectacle. But the optimism was there, it was a very optimistic time. And then I found the mid-80s to be a very depressing time. These things come in cycles. I got very excited in the early 1990s, a lot of the UK underground basement noise music. The Shadow Ring was vaguely associated with that scene. Phil Todd, Betley Welcomes Careful Drivers. I might not have enjoyed all the records, but it really seemed like there was a push, a momentum to get things back to some level where experimental music was interesting again.

KB I think the level of quality, the level of respect from the audience has just gone down. Just because there's so much of it now! So many [musicians] that are moving around without any kind of plan. But that's the way they like it. The people think that to have some kind of discipline, or a plan, or a limit, is bad. It's like this hippy thing! Don't fence me in, you know? To me, you have to have some sort of a boundary, even if it's self-imposed, to work within. When I listen to music, if it has some kind of a rule that your brain can grab onto, even if it's just a broad pattern, is more interesting than just some random set of dots.

EP I don't know if you've heard much contemporary European laptop music, but you're exactly describing it. All these people. They won't learn limits, or disciplines, and they're all about the gadgets which they buy. Laptops, mixing desks, filters, pedals, samples...but where's the ideas?

KB Right, that's the thing, it's just a random mixture. But that's what a lot of people think now. It's not like they have some kind of idea of shaping it, giving it some kind of whatever. I don't really mean like a song structure obviously, but just something. I think they just don't have any interest in that. To me, it doesn't connect. My brain does not connect to that. Sometimes just because it's really loud, [audiences] are into some kind of big extreme experience. I just can't get into it. Even if – again, this is a very un-Anti-Naturals concept, but even if you think about primitive man, why do people like music? Because it goes with your heartbeat. Rhythm, and shaping things, and connecting intellectually. That's to me what is engaging. It's not engaging to me to just have...a blob! But it seems that's what everyone's really into now, [they think] it's really free. (Sigh). I guess it sounds fascist to say they should be disciplined, but I don't even mean discipline like personal discipline. It's been very discouraging.

SF I like to think that my own [music] – and I guess if you compartmentalise my bands you could maybe make that case – but I think that is a really good template of a way to [operate]. Keep a sound, have an identity, but at the same time progress. I think progress is important. I believe in progress! A lot of people don't! All of a sudden you can't progress any more. I think post-modernism, which started out as a very nice critique of modernism, which is always in need of critique, turned into just a reason for everyone to like crap and for everyone not to care. The use value of it seems very very low. And of course that's another thing that perhaps was turned into something it didn't originally start out as.

THE ANTI-NATURALS

EP What can you tell me about the Anti-Naturals? Is there a manifesto, or a philosophy?

SF There is a manifesto, which we included on the first record. I met Dr Tim Shortell, who's now a Professor of Sociology at Brooklyn College. He was at the time teaching at Smith, and Karla met him and she immediately thought here's someone who's interested in theory. We hooked up and ended up getting along famously, and having lots of long conversations. That must have been in about 1995 or so. I've always liked the model of an avant-garde organisation, like the Surrealists or the Situationists. Because it brings a lot of people under an umbrella, trying to make your point more clear. So Tim and I and Karla all talked about it, we were the founding members, and I knew Graham then, he's not as interested in theory as I am, but I knew he'd join up. There's really not very many [members], maybe ten people who I would list.

EP It wasn't just theory though, I assume.

SF No, no. Not just theory, theory about art and the way it interacts with the world. [Within the Anti-Naturals cadre] there's music and writing and films, and I like this whole ball of action. This isn't a doctrinaire organisation, where everyone has to believe the same things, at all. It seemed a good way to get a little more attention, get our message out a little better.

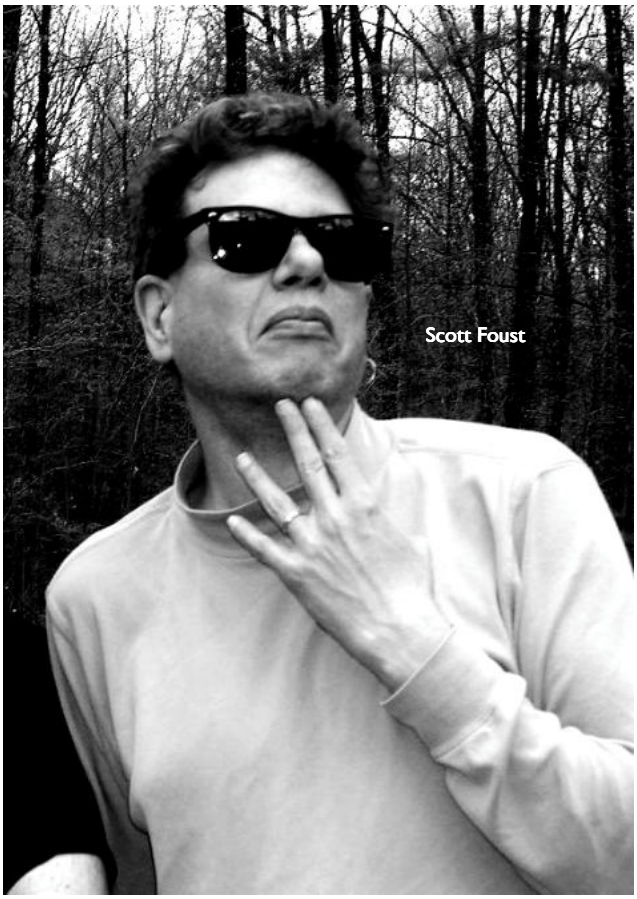
EP There was an element within it, was there not, that everything in a person's life must become aestheticised? So this presumes you expect some kind of action to happen, if Anti-Naturals is to succeed.

SF Yeah, I would expect society to be a much different place. I don't really believe that that *can* happen, but there's no reason I should stop trying. Most people have this weird thing about their personality. That if you think about your personality or try to adjust it, then somehow you're being dishonest. People think with their personalities that there's a real self, and I believe what people consider to be the real self is just all the stuff from the media and their parents and the whole society that's been poured into them, without critically thinking about it. And if you think about your personality and adjust it in certain ways, that you're a phoney. But this isn't right at all, because what you've done then is just accepted the things that society has told you, and how your mind has processed them, and then just accepted this, as 'this is me'.

KB Of course it doesn't mean that it's Anti-Nature. But what it is supposed to mean is that people keep trying to get back to what's natural for them. And they end up getting the impression from the world of advertising that this product is going to make them [into] their true self. And it also partly refers to the fact that people fall back on saying, 'oh that's my nature', or 'that's the nature of man to be cruel'. Well, even if that's true, which I don't think it necessarily is, then we should be able to fight that. I mean, you have a brain, you can [think], you don't have to just [accept].

SF I think you're much better off building your own personality. I really believe that an aesthetic approach, which is part science, and part art and beauty, [means that] you want to make things better all the time. You want to adjust them. And I think you should do that with your personality. I think that you can really improve, or make yourself more interesting. I have to say, I've worked quite hard at it. It's more than just learning. It's critically thinking about almost [everything], even your emotions. People don't want to

Objets by Karla



critically think about their emotions.

KB I think sometimes people use [human nature] as an excuse, and sometimes it's used to manipulate people. Now Scott and Tim go further. They talk about the idea that everyone has a 'created personality'. But in some ways even if you're making choices about what sort of aspects you want to have in your personality, that's still based on some kind of experience, or some kind of 'you' that has been formed by your experience. Scott and I, we laugh [about this], because I'm like a soft determinist, as we would say in the traditional philosophical world, whereas he is more of a free will person. I don't know about it, if you're going to go too far with that, then you end up being creepy.

SF One of the things about the Anti-Naturals that I'm really big on is that everything in your life should be critically approached. That's the most [important thing]. You should think about it. Otherwise, what have you done? You're just regurgitating all these things that have been [handed down], and the world will never get better if you keep doing that. It will never become any better. I don't think there's anyone in this world who would not agree that things need to be done, because there's a lot of [problems]. Poverty, the earth is being destroyed slowly...

EP So what you're saying is, let's start the process with ourselves?

SF Yes, because it has to start with you.

EP And you've pinned your faith on art having the power to do this?

SF. Yes, I've pinned my faith on art as a revolutionary force. I think there's a revolutionary force in art, although Debord would say it's been co-opted. It certainly can be, but I think that if you do the work right, there's a kernel in there that can't be. And that kernel is where I pin my hopes! That seed! And maybe in twenty years I'll have a different opinion about that, but for now that's what I think is the way to go.

MUSICAL HISTORY

EP Can you tell us something about the history of bands you've performed in. I know you released a tape compiling work from previous projects.

SF I got interested in music rather late. I don't think I bought any records until I was 15, which would have been 1972. I just wasn't really interested in it, and then one day my brother had bought a K-Tel compilation record, and I heard this Jimi Hendrix song, 'Red House', and I was just fascinated by the guitar sound. So I got interested in his music and music in general pretty quickly. Of course, I never thought I could play any music. It may be hard for people to understand, but at the time music was played by people like rock stars, and they were much more intelligent and adept at everything than you would ever be. And I suppose, although I never really cared for the music, the start of breaking that was the pub rock scene in the UK. Then there was punk rock and all of a sudden it really seemed to open up a world of possibilities, and post-punk opened up even more. All of a sudden, you could be the artist too. You didn't have to be standing there a million miles away watching God play the guitar.

The first band I had was called Y Front, and I played guitar and sang a little, and Mike Popovich played the bass, and Chris Scarpino did synthesizer and some guitar, and Rich Labrie played the drums. We had ideas of possibly doing a record, but you know, creative tensions...so the band split into two, which is where the business actually started. One being The XX Committee which was Chris and I, and the other being Story Of Failure which was Mike and Rich and I. There was a Story Of Failure record, the first Swill Radio release was a single. But The XX Committee, we made a demo tape and sent it out to a couple of magazines, and this label in San Francisco, the guy who ran a magazine called ARPH wrote back and said they'll put this out as a tape. So we had the very first release on their label which was *The XX Committee Steel Negro Music*. So Chris and I started sending around demo tapes to record labels. The first call we got was from Charles Ball who ran Lust On Lust. A New York No Wave sort of label. And he was very enthusiastic about it. And we sent one to Subterranean Records which was a San Francisco-based organisation, and by luck, the guy who ran the label was listening to the tape, and John Bouchard who ran Thermidor Records was walking by the room and heard it. John got in touch... Chris and I thought, 'well, this is easy!' We just sent out a demo tape, and the next thing, that record came out in 1983.

Chris was of the mind that, now we had this record out things were really gonna change. Of course, we didn't really play any shows, and he got very disgusted with the whole music business in general. I drifted about for a while, did the Story Of Failure stuff, then I got together with a guy named [Rick Vrabel]. He made very odd music done with home-made instruments, and it was very interesting. And I said we should record together some time. He had a commercial studio but it just wasn't making money, so he was closing it down, so we got together and formed the band Anschluss. We did a couple of tapes and one record. That was the first band I started taking improvisations and collaging them together and editing them.

After a while it was becoming less and less satisfying to me because Rick Vrabel – the more music he played, the more he wanted to learn how to actually play music, so he taught himself how to sight-read, and [learned] to play a lot of songs, and it was really a bad idea. Some people can do that, I mean Karla sight-reads quite well and she's very talented. But Rick started to play really hokey stuff all the time. Patterns...you know, we'd be playing away and all of a sudden I recognise a Cyndi Lauper chord progression. Oh! So it sort of fell apart.

KB We did have a band where we had lyrics. The Red Disk. It was more of a traditional rock band. One of the songs was in French because I loved French. Also we had a song where I recited slogans, those slogans that people spray-painted during the '68 uprising, like 'sous le pave, le plage'. I remember when I read the stuff, I read it like an announcement at an airport. (Laughs) I would just repeat it several times! But in a generic pleasant voice! So we actually had proper songs and I sang. [This happened] maybe about nine years ago. Our friend Greg was the drummer and he committed suicide unfortunately. When we were recording that stuff, he was going downhill and drinking a lot of Pernod. He had that very boozy liquorice smell. Ooof! I also remember the Oklahoma City bombing happened, and Greg was totally oblivious to it because he was caught in his own difficulties.

That was one of my first times since I had gotten into that different sort of mode that we actually wrote songs together. Mike and I, that's the guy we're in The Pickle Factory with, we connect a lot on a lot of things, and we were left to the rhythm section. There was one time when we had figured out this song, it had a slightly complicated break. And Greg wasn't really interested in rhythm, and in repetition. You'd think most drummers would be. No, he wanted to do drum painting! That's what he called it. He was really into amorphous, making sounds with drums. Mike and I tried to explain how this break was gonna happen. We'd say 'remember this part, and then there's this,'. And Greg would say OK. Then he'd play it, and he wouldn't get it. So for half an hour we're beating our heads against [a brick wall]...(laughter)...he just didn't get it!

SF So that's how the Pickle Factory was born. Karla, Mike and I all played really well together right away. Mike and I had been collaborating for a while, and he always said he would never play without a drummer. But when he did, he loved it! We recorded *Our Pledge,* and when that came out in 1994, we really thought it would do well. *Our Pledge* had a lot of Krautrock elements - along with touches of Eno and Dome, and that was right around the time when Krautrock was starting to be big again. But it was a sales disaster. We recorded a follow-up, *Our Name Means Excitement*, which I'll release somehow, as it is excellent.

HERE'S TO LOVE FILM

EP So, you've also made a film! How long has it taken you?

SF Two and half years! It's called *Here's To Love!* The shooting took about six months, and then the editing's been about two years, and I'm just about finished with it now.

EP It hasn't come out of nowhere, has it? You have a history, collaborators...

SF That's right, Tim has made a bunch of films, and Tim and Graham have done some excellent short films together. And I did one called *Right Now*, and Tim and Karla and I worked on another one, the Manifesto of the Anti-Naturals, which was basically just the manifesto read with subtitles. The only equipment [we have] is really an 8mm video camera. I'd been thinking about doing a long film. [It] was a really interesting idea, in the sense that there is no way I should actually really be able to make one. I like challenges like that! I came up with a workable scheme. And I had met Matt Krefting in 1999. Through him I met Jessi Swenson and Meara O'Reilly. They seemed perfect for what I wanted. They weren't really actors. Meara may have had a bit of acting training. But they really looked good and they understood what I wanted, as they're all very intelligent, so we started shooting the film. It had its disasters, but it didn't go that badly till the end, then I really just spent the last two years editing it. And it's been constant work. I've never worked nearly so hard on anything. And I don't really know that I will again.

EP Why was it so much work?

SF Because, one thing is I don't like the way video looks that much. A lot of the work was in the shooting, because [in post-production] I haven't really done much digital manipulation, other than slowing things down, and the editing. It was just hard to get the film to look the way I wanted it to. To make it say what I wanted it to. It just took time. There was a long scene and a lot of technical difficulties, but mostly it was just watching the footage over and over, making a whole lot of notes, and I was probably sitting in front of the computer for four hours a day. One of those years was spent just watching the footage constantly. Trying to figure out how to knit it together, to get what I wanted out of it.

Here's To Love! cast

EP And the soundtrack is mostly music by your bands...

SF Yeah, there's some unreleased music and there's a little bit of sound work, a brief bit of narration, but the rest of the movie is just music. But it's not an abstract film. There's people and a story in it. Not really any acting for the most part. Most of the action is represented by poses. And this is nothing against Matt or Jessi or Meara but when you don't have actors, don't have them act! And acting isn't some mystical thing, but it is still something you have to know how to do. And I didn't really want acting anyway. I decided it wasn't something I wanted at all.

EP Karla, what has been your contribution?

KB I did some of cinematography, and I did the scenes when Scott was here in the house. He would tell me what he wanted to capture and I would do it in my way. So it was a good collaborative thing. There were specific shots he wanted, like he needed a shot of the Fall 7" or whatever, but if I saw something that looked visually interesting, I would say do that again, because I could see that it looked good. He had this method which he came up with, where we would film from too far away so it goes in and out of focus. Over some of the technical things, Scott and I almost got a divorce several times! He thought I knew about computers, so I would know about this [editing] program. But it's a really complicated program. It's Final Cut Pro. Sometimes we'd have some little crisis right before we went to bed, where [a shot had changed]. 'This looks different now!' Well, the program had in its infinite wisdom decided things should be done this way since you're doing this, and he's freaking out! But really, it was nice, because Scott gives me a chance to do graphic things that ordinarily I wouldn't get a chance to.

EP The story of the film seems to be a kind of modernist fable...

SF It's sort of a romantic journey. The story concerns the head of an avant-garde art organisation, played by me, who's been forgotten by society, abandoned by his friends and left alone. And Matt and Jessi and Meara play three beautiful young people who have been inspired by my work. And then they come and find me and rescue me, and then there's a party, and an exciting denouement, which I won't reveal! (Laughter) You'll have to see the film! It's so exciting! But it's not a very complicated story. The scenes are all fairly long. I wouldn't say it's fast-moving or anything. But I'm really happy with what it came out to be.

EP It's probably a bit early to tell, but do you have any sense of how this film fits into your overall pattern of ideas?

SF I kind of look at this as my big work that ties together a lot of the ideas I have. A film, I like to think, makes some of these ideas a little more clear than perhaps they are from just records.

EP How would it make things clearer?

SF Maybe it makes the music a little bit more easy to understand, just because it gives people a hold they can get on it, and I think maybe it makes the ideas I have about the world maybe easier to understand as well. On the other hand, it becomes very very difficult when you work on something for so long to be able to see it quite as clearly as maybe you would like. We have old records and there's a track that really bothers you and annoys me. So I really make it a case to try and go through and make sure there isn't anything that, ten years down the line, I'm going to find really offensive. I think actually it's sort of a neat way to work, because I don't want to embarrass myself later.

EP You want to employ the same critical faculty and quality control to this film, as you do with the records...

SF Very much. Certainly working in a different medium, but it's very much the way I put together an IFCO record.

EP Did you study any kind of film-making technique?

SF No, I don't know how to make a film at all. And I think that in some ways that's a little bit worked to my advantage. I've watched a lot of films. But I don't know anything about how to make one. Well, I do now! (Laughs)

IN SUMMARY

EP Is there anything else I can ask you about?

KB Nobody ever talks to me, so I've got a lot built up in me. I would be offended if I thought people were ignoring me because I was just the girl or something. That would offend me. But by the same token I don't think I should get attention because I'm a woman. I just want attention because I'm good at what I do! I think I'm more and more engaged in what we're doing, and I think it's very engaging. It's not perfect, but...I guess we'll just keep plodding on anyway and hope that someday somebody gets it, or likes it. There must be somebody. A few people like it!

SF I say this all the time, but I really think it's important for people who make records to listen to their own music a lot. I think a lot of people make it, then move on...they say 'I don't want to hear that again!' You should have to hear it again. They should listen to their own records, because that's the way you learn about what you've done right and what you've done wrong.

EP So, I would hope that you regard each new release of your own as an improvement on previous works...

Photo by Scott Foust. From Timothy Shortell's film, *The Terrible Comet Salt*

SF Oh, an attempt at it, anyway! But I was very happy with the *Anti-Natural* LP, that's why I didn't do another one for [a long time]. You know, Karla and I did a lot of recording for a follow-up, but it just seemed like it was gonna be the same record, and I just didn't want to make the same record again. I try to move on, move ahead. ☐

Some records (and a film)…

IFCO

Idea Fire Company started off with a double LP, whose title *Explosion In A Shingle Factory* refers to the reception given to a Marcel Duchamp painting by the mob. It sets the agenda for the mix of improvisation and collage techniques. At most successful, the musical passages are suspended in a perfect framework of airy and spacey field recordings. At very worst, you may get passages of droney sludge, but they're unlike any other you may have heard. The couple built on the lessons learned and made a second double LP, *The Fourth Dimension is Money*, expanding the line-up with friends and family to form temporary, fictitious groups. For this listener, this is one of the most successful LPs, with a good 50-50 split of beautiful organ continuum music with the more menacing collage pieces. Only the Guy Debord lecture piece mars listening enjoyment. The third LP, *Anti-Naturals*, sees an almost clean break with conventional beauty and a sharp turn towards difficult, impenetrable textures, almost purely made by alien-sounding synths. This harsh LP almost negates the achievements of its predecessors; this strategy reflects Foust's fear of repeating himself. That said, it's a real grower that repays close listening. Fourth IFCO LP, *Stranded*, incorporates the slightly younger team of O'Reilly and Swinson.

Tart

Tart, which started performing around 1999, are the core duo of IFCO with addition of Graham Lambkin. Amazingly, the music which results is almost completely different, clearly pulling in several directions and venturing into sonic territory which IFCO normally leave alone. Both Tart LPs to date make for rather uncomfortable listening. *Radio Orange* was edgy enough, but the 2nd LP *Bring In The Admiral* is positively steeped in intelligent, wiry paranoia. The oscillating mesmerism of Borecky is still there, but thrown off-centre by Lambkin's baleful influence.

The Pickle Factory

The Pickle Factory are the label's pop band in comparison with the determined experimentation of above LPs. With help of Popovich and a drum machine, a warped version of UK post-punk emerges, swallowing whole influences from The Pop Group, This Heat, Gang Of Four, The Fall and hosts of others; an all-instrumental LP and in places even quite danceable. One LP to date, *Our Pledge*, whose enjoyable contents are belied by its severe minimalist packaging; the front cover is an arty photo of a pipe on a wall (also used in a Foust film). Also released on CD in a card package as a resentful stab against jewel cases.

The New Peculiars

The New Peculiars – a conceptual joke on paper, sounds fantastic on record. Lively insane noise that you can use to clean out the corners of your house while simultaneously raising the roof. Borecky's fairly eccentric parents are the stars. Three raucous singles released to date.

Early work

Foust's recorded pre-history is becoming slightly 'collectible', probably due to age of records rather than anything to do with their musical quality. The XX Committee LP was offered by our friend Stefan for a hefty whack. The Anschluss LP was an early Swill Radio release. A compilation tape on Foust's Pineapple Tapes is called *The Fighting Sensualist* and includes samples of music from just about every stage of his so-called career, with more detailed notes than you could possibly need.

Here's To Love!

This feature-length video work has occupied Foust's every waking moment for the last 2 years. It's a very strong statement. It concentrates on saying one thing at a time; each micro-episode in the story is told through emphasising and repeating the main actions over and over, much like Stan Brakhage does in *Dog Star Man*. While we're making comparisons, the gin-drinking scenes (which resemble a polite orgy) are strongly reminiscent of the drug scenes from *Inauguration of the Pleasure Dome*. There's the same 'rush' to the imagery as the protagonists in the film get higher and higher. Foust has seen neither of these important films – he remains avowedly ignorant of most avant-garde cinema in fact. Apart from some minimal voice-over at the beginning, the film is mostly free from dialogue or speech, and remains a sequence of lush images counterposed with IFCO music. Mostly, it's the 'difficult' synth-looping material from Anti-Natural, which creates a near-insufferable effect at times, but does the job of drawing you into the images.

Web: http://www.anti-naturals.org/swill/
http://www.anti-naturals.org/
Email: swill@anti-naturals.org
Address: Swill Radio
P.O. Box 9401
North Amherst, MA
01059-9401
USA

The Vibracathedral Orchestra

Presenting the UK's The Vibracathedral Orchestra, who are known nationally as some form of underground hero band. They don't do songs, just long-form drone-based instrumentals, and are known for practising a lot and playing live whenever possible. There are a lot of record releases in their name, but not a single LP or CD (or cassette, or CDR) that you can single out to recommend – they're all equally as good as each other. Or equally dire, to put it another way. In many ways they tend to resemble The Grateful Dead – another band who were at their best playing live. To me, this is a good thing, although probably the members of the Orch would shoot me dead for making a comparison like that. I'm thinking of an interview with Jerry Garcia of the Dead, conducted by an indignant and arrogant Paul Morley for the NME, some time in the 1980s. He upbraided Gracia because, despite all the records they had made (and there are a lot), the Dead had never really made a 'definitive' LP. And he left it at that.

What does Morley mean by 'definitive'? He has a very narrow agenda, common to UK critics and fans, where we measure success of a band exclusively by their published statements. The 'Sgt Pepper' factor – we're always looking for a band's 'best' LP. I suppose, since it was in the 1980s, Morley wanted The Dead to make an LP as 'great' as The Human League's *Dare*. The point of this is to reiterate that there is no single recorded piece of music by The Vibracathedral Orchestra which you can buy which will allow you to sum them up, to file them away, to contain them. Instead, just listen to as much as you can; see them live (it's not difficult); then perhaps a pattern may begin to emerge. If you're a completist collector, good luck. They're working hard to make life very difficult for you.

Another characteristic of this lot is that they don't like giving interviews. And even if they do, they don't end up saying anything much about their music. My interview of course was an exception (ho ho). A lot of people assume this is because these talented artists say everything in their music, not through words; and that the rapport of this unit is so mysterious and impenetrable, that they're all communicating on some secret level of transcendence, unknown to us lesser mortals. And they leave it at that. The fact is that if the Orchestra ever really had to think about how they actually operate, and then try and explain it to someone, either the whole thing would evaporate, or they'd be shown up as charlatans immediately. There's no mystery to it. In fact, there's nothing to it.

Neil Campbell is the most 'charismatic' of the combo, and through bullying, assertiveness and manipulative mind games, has managed to confirm his position as the unspoken 'leader'. The remaining band members frequently claim to be 'shy' or have nothing to say, but the truth is they are living in fear under the reign of terror of this man. Next to him, Captain Beefheart comes across like Mahatma Gandhi. I guess Campbell's earned it though; at least he has a history of larking about in underground combos, like the so-called 'legendary' A Band. He didn't want to talk about that episode much, but clearly it was a band filled with weirdoes, druggies, street people and hippies. Campbell thus has some musical experience and understanding (even when he pretends he doesn't know one end of a guitar from a grand piano), which is more than you can say for the rest of the bunch, who seem to have wandered into the band directly from dabbling about with their pots of paint in art college.

Seriously, the 'trancey' music of the Orchestra is much to be recommended (that's if you like a nice droney tune) and praise for it has been a regular feature of this magazine since about 1998. Then for some reason they stopped sending me records. I guess they figured out I'd heard all I needed to. And they left it at that. At one point it seemed their star was in the ascendancy, because Julian Cope started to take an interest. Not only did he put them on a festival bill with some big names, he started to write nice things about them and their records…on his website, so that all the fans of Cope's music could find out about them too. When you've got support like that behind you, how can you fail? (EP)

Interview took place at The Sage, Gateshead, 21 May 2005

NC = Neil Campbell
AD = Adam Davenport
EP = Ed Pinsent

EP How many people are in the Orchestra right now?

NC Four. But tonight there'll be six. We have a few people that are extras. The lineup is us two and Mick Flowers and Bridget Hayden. We were a five-piece for a long time but Julian Bradley had had enough last year. We were a really tight five-piece, and people would write about us and they'd call us like a floating hippy collective, as if there was a different lineup every time. Wildly untrue. But now it's actually a little closer to the truth. We have John Godbert who plays with us sometimes – he'll be playing tonight. And Matthew Bower played for a while. Tonight we're also gonna have Pete Nolan out of the Magik Markers playing with us. He's our friend. We never played with him before. And he's flying off back home to America shortly. The Magik Markers are from New York...and he's in Virgin Eye Blood Brothers. And he's just been on tour for a month a half. A Virgin Eye tour and a Magik Markers tour! And he's looking remarkably well.

EP There's a lot of good stuff coming out of New York.

NC I like Excepter a lot. They're a great band. You should check out Excepter. And I like Black Dice too.

EP What instruments do you play?

NC Everything.

AD We swap round.

NC Our backbone is still nominally like a rock set-up, even though we don't particularly play that, we do guitars and percussion, drums...but then we embellish it with whatever's around. I think earlier on we used a lot more ethnic instruments, and now we use more electronics.

AD It just depends – if we're doing a gig we can't really use so many acoustic instruments, or we tend not to do that.

NC We've got a practice space over at Mick's house. It's a perfect thing. In a small room we can use small instruments.

AD Delicate things, that probably wouldn't survive on the road...

NC And we used to take them to gigs, and once everything's cranked up there'd be no sounds coming out of these things.

EP What kind of instruments make these delicate sounds?

AD Recorders or tamboras.

NC Toy Japan banjoes, the Iktara-thing. Recorders carry well. We still use them. You'll probably see some recorders tonight.

AD Smaller drums as well, stuff like that perhaps.

NC Mick's sitar, that we haven't used much, reed organs, that kind of thing. Stuff that's too much of a pain in the arse to amplify we won't bother with live.

AD It just ain't worth it, it's too much bother.

NC But I do think we've been moving slowly, not consciously, and it could change next week, from embellishing that basic sound with all those acoustic instruments towards using more electronic instruments.

AD Yeah, that's probably true.

NC We all move in different directions, but...

AD It depends what new little thing we've bought.

EP I always thought violins seemed to be a big part of the sound?

NC Yeah. Early on I used to play this little toy violin, and then Bridget picked it up before graduating to a viola. The duty's passed from me to Bridget, she plays viola really nicely and much better than I do.

AD Early on we probably used to bow guitars a bit more. And bowed cymbals...

NC It just sort of moves and we don't think about it. In a way, the music doesn't change. It's the same kind of core stuff, but it moves – enough to keep us amused. And there's enough instrument fiends in the band who just spend their spare cash on new instruments and new effects. And so we accommodate that. I'm thinking of Mick particularly.

AD I like to buy new stuff, or old stuff.

EP I've been aware of you since about 1997 or 1998. Have you been going longer than that?

NC No, 1998 was the first time we played as a quintet. Before that, it was two different trios.

AD Have you seen us play live before?

EP No, never. Been sent a few records over time.

Neil Campbell on stage

NC It's so variable, you know. We just don't have a game plan, or even a little bit of a plan, when we play live. When we first started, we would talk about it and work out what sort of sound we would start with, based on a recent rehearsal. But now we just don't...if someone says 'what are we going to play tonight?', everyone shrugs. We just hit the stage and see what happens. We're really free that way.

EP Is the rehearsal quite a big part of it? In terms of evolving...

NC Playing regularly. Rehearsal's the wrong word.

AD It's not really rehearsal, it's just playing. It's a big part of it for me. I mean, I love playing. Perhaps even more than performing live.

NC We get into a real...we have a room that we play in, we might meet on a Wednesday night in the week. We've all been at work or doing the day things. And we just clear a space for three hours. You just start playing, and someone turns the tape on, and maybe two hours later we come out of this trance thing. And it evolves through all these things.

AD That's what it's about really.

NC You crawl home at midnight, and it's dashed away all your cares from the day.

EP What, respectively, were you doing before the Orchestra? Were you playing music before?

NC Yeah, I've been doing it for a long time. Mick's been doing it for a long time.

AD I've not been doing it, well...

NC Everyone had played in bands before, to varying degrees. I guess you'd never played before in a band like this. I've never played in a band like this, but I've played in bands that might be somewhere near. I played in the A Band at the end of the eighties, early nineties.

EP I've heard of that. Tell me more about that.

NC It was just like really where we started playing big-band improvised things, and we'd have children playing, and people who didn't know how to play. There'd be a core of us who were into, I guess, left-of-centre music and would just rope everyone in.

EP Who else was in it, besides yourself?

NC That you would know? Richard Youngs, Stewart Walden, Jim Plaistow, Stream Angel, there was loads of people. It had a much more, I don't know, for want of a better description, performance-art Dada edge to it than Vibracathedral. We'd be playing this droney music and we'd have someone doing a live action painting, naked, eating fire. So it was kind of daft. But we had this core of rocking sort of thing. We made a few records, by default, I think! It was much more, anyone can join in and that. I think that some people perceive what Vibracathedral do as being that as well. Every now and again, particularly when we were first playing out, we might get a hippy come up to the front trying to bang a drum with us. We'd have to put him off, whereas in the A Band, we'd have given him a guitar. In the A Band, we'd have left the stage and got him to play instead.

EP Are you based in Leeds?

NC Yes. Adam and myself both live outside Leeds. We congregate around Leeds.

EP Can you tell our readers a little bit about the Termite Club? Are you involved in it?

NC I used to be. I guess it's just the Leeds free music promoters. They've given us some gigs. And it's good, because they've been knocking away at it for so many years. You will see unusual music in Leeds. You will see Borbetomagus playing in the shitty back room of a pub. There aren't many other cities in Britain like that. And Leeds has also got a really good, again for want of a better word, punk rock sort of scene that has been really good for us. Because we get to play with loads of bands. There's a really good live music scene. I guess what we do is very much live music. We don't overdub or nothing. So it's really good for us to play live.

AD It's good to put people up as well. Mick often puts people up. You know, travelling over, that are playing in Leeds.

NC Visiting Americans...because they're our friends and our contemporaries.

AD That's a good part of it, isn't it, that we get to...often we're the support act for bands coming over and we'll put 'em up, and you know vice versa. We play over there.

NC Yes, Leeds has really unglamorous, street level events, you know. There's the Termite Club, and there's all the Leeds 6, Cops and Robbers things that happen, and there's us. And we put on Sunburned Hand of the Man, No-Neck Blues Band, Matt Valentine, a festival of bands from the Belgian Kraak label, Avarus...they're our friends and our contemporaries. I guess there aren't many other cities like that. It's really rickety, though. It's hand to mouth!

AD Leeds is a good sized city as well to do that, I think. It's not too big. It's not like London where they might get lost, the people doing it. Whereas I think that definitely Leeds is just the right size. That if something's going on, people know about it. That's true.

NC It's been really good for us. We would still be playing music like this if we lived in the Orkneys, or something. But Leeds has been good, even for us just meeting each other. But for playing live, it has been great.

EP You've released quite a few records. Do you like to release records?

NC Yeah, oh yeah. The main thing is just about making music, and all our records are is just a tape recorder in the room, and a live document of what we're doing. That's all any of our records are. And in a way, someone should just walk past the rehearsal room and dangle a microphone in the window and bootleg us. That probably would be the best record we ever made. There's something quite arbitrary about what finds its way onto our records, in a way. I mean, there are certain jams that are particularly special, and we search them out.

AD It's been a while since we've released a proper one where we've sat down and edited it together. It's been probably a couple of years, hasn't it?

EP I seem to remember hearing you talk about the editing process.

NC There was a point where it became so baroque and heavily involved, it was painful.

AD Christ...we've got so many tapes to get through, haven't we? I mean if we were going to put them all together, we've perhaps got 18 months' worth of tapes to get through.

NC We play most weeks....

AD And we record everything, so each week we've got a C90 or something like that, from each week. So it adds up.

NC And loads of the stuff we throw away is great!

AD Yeah, there's been some great stuff from a year ago...

NC It doesn't matter, really. You can't get precious about it.

EP But the editing process was a bit fraught?

NC Well, it has been I think. Just logistically.

AD Getting us all into one room. Mick's done CDs, given us 5 or 6 CDs full. We all go away and listen to them. We all come back...

NC With completely different choices...(laughter)

AD We all go away again, make notes, come back, sit down...the majority of it we agree on, but when it gets to the fine-tuning...

NC I think what we've realised from that is, that someone should wander past us and bootleg us. Probably that's the best record we're ever gonna make. Whatever. What we do is what we do. We don't even know when it's good. Perhaps it's down to the fact we do record everything, and we do have someone that's very good at archiving. Mick's very good and he's very keen on recording, and he records us fabulously, with very old equipment as well. He's an enthusiast. So we have so many tapes. If it was left to me, we'd probably forget to record most things. And that would be OK too. Maybe we're cursed. Maybe we should just release everything. We do CDRs as well too, to give away or sell at gigs, in small editions. You shouldn't feel you have to hear them all.

EP Do people collect them all? I know you offer certain editions through the website, are you building up a fanbase of people, completists?

NC Yeah, I would guess there are people trying to get them all. We're trying to fuck that up a bit. Because tonight we've made 50 CDs to sell here in hand-painted sleeves. It was a gig we did two or three weeks ago in Nottingham that seemed pretty rockin' and good. We just thought we'd put that out, without really thinking about it too much.

AD I hadn't heard it...until you gave me a CD.

NC That's it. It just felt right.

EP Is the DIY ethos quite important to you?

AD I think so.

NC Yeah. I think we've become more so since Mick sent up a screenprinting thing in his cellar. And Adam's really into screenprinting.

AD I think that whole thing is definitely good, doing the artwork and putting it out in DIY style, yeah.

EP But you don't have a distributor, a formal arrangement...

NC Well, VHF puts out what we deem a corporate CD every year or so. But it's still just cut from our jams, in our rooms. They've got good distribution, I have to say. They have barcodes on it and stuff! So we're not averse to that, but you've got to keep it real, you know? You've got to keep putting your own stuff out!

EP Have you ever made a solo record, Adam?

AD No. No. I record stuff at home and maybe one day I will, yeah. I've just never got round to it.

EP But you've made a solo record, Neil.

NC Shit! Loads of them! Hundreds of them! You know I have! You know.

AD Almost everyone has apart from me now, haven't they?

NC Yes, Bridget's been dipping her toe a bit, hasn't she? And Mick's got some CDRs that you can get. Yes, Adam would make a great one. Some of the tapes that Adam drops in to our jams, if you just mixed them, they'd make a brilliant record.

AD Yeah, I've got loads of little bits and bobs. I find it quite difficult to play alone, actually. Well, I enjoy it, but I think you have to do it in a completely different way to playing with other people. I enjoy the interaction.

NC Oh yeah, there's something so much more powerful about four or five of you in a room, just doing it in real time. Recording it to two-track stereo mike. It's the way to go.

EP I've said it before, but I've always thought that when you get going, you're every bit as good as the La Monte Young combo, the Dream Syndicate.

NC Hey! We're better than that! Because we've got a huge pop music vibe to us!

EP That too. And also, you can't get a single bloody record by La Monte Young...

NC No, they're great records. Bloody good records. Yeah.

AD There's more than enough records by us. There's too many by us.

EP You don't have any avant-garde aspirations or fine art aspirations?

AD Well, how do you mean?

EP Well, La Monte Young definitely does. He sees himself as a composer. It's all about ownership of the music. The bone of contention with him is that these things which are obviously group improvisations, he declares himself the sole owner of. Because he composed them.

AD So, what...if we copyrighted the chord of D?

EP Yes, if you did that would be considered a high art move, and people would take a lot more notice of you.

NC Ahh no, we're just jamming it out, you know. It's not like we're ignorant of this stuff or anything, but we're just playing rocking music to make you feel good. Although, I think, so is La Monte Young. It's stuff that makes you feel great and gets your head spinning. That's all we're trying to do. Sometimes it works, sometimes it doesn't.

EP It's a completely fatuous observation on my part, but it's just interesting to hear what you might have to say about it.

NC But I lean to pop music always. Because none of us grew up listening to La Monte Young. We grew up listening to The Velvet Underground of course. It would be crazy to play that down, and that's our link to all that minimalist stuff.

EP You also play in Sunroof occasionally?

NC Sometimes. Not for a long time. I think all of us have at some point. Apart from Adam, I think everyone in Vibracathedral has.

EP What is Sunroof's core membership?

NC It's just Matthew Bower. I don't know if Sunroof's still a going thing. There's so many projects and they all bleed into one. Where does Sunroof end and Skullflower begin? I don't know. Yes, we've all played with Matthew. And in fact I'd played with Matthew before I played with these guys. And that's how I know John Godbert, playing as a trio with John, myself and Matthew. I think that was really important for me, just musical ideas which I think have recurred for me in this band. I don't know who's in Sunroof right now. Who knows?

EP I've heard some stuff by them recently, but I suppose they were quite old records. One of them's got a hummingbird on the cover.

NC Oh yes, that'd be *Bliss*. Yes, disc two of that is basically just me and Matthew. Right?

EP Ian Middleton sold me his entire Sunroof collection. Do you know Ian?

NC Sure. He's a nice guy. Very reclusive.

EP Have you worked with Phil Todd at all?

AD Sometimes. We've played gigs with him a few times, yeah.

NC Yeah. We probably don't play often enough with Phil! I would like to play more...I haven't played with Phil for years, but we always end up just playing on the same bill, and we're friends...mates. Maybe there's a healthy rivalry. I don't know. He's in Leeds. We've played with Ashtray Navigations and Avarus a couple of weeks ago. Ashtray played first and they were just incredible. They were magical and explosive. And you know, they weren't a million miles away from what we're doing. And then we went on, and we sucked terribly! Yeah, it was...fuck you, Todd! So perhaps it's going to evolve into like a real rivalry.

EP I certainly hope so. A battle of the bands.

NC We drove up together today. Phil's actually got a regular Ashtray Navigations band now as well. It's been very ad-hoc before. But now he's definitely got a core quartet. And they've been really good.

EP Suddenly there's a load of his records coming out lately.

NC Yeah! And they're great! Phil's great. You should interview Phil today!

EP I'd love to.

NC He's around.

EP I know Phil slightly. He took me to see Christmas on Earth. That Barbara Rubin film. He knows all about underground, avant-garde cinema.

NC He's well into his film.

EP He said, you've gotta see this...the ultimate underground film. I was absolutely staggered. It's made by this New York girl called Barbara Rubin, who was about 16 or 18 when she made it...and she got all her friends to come round and perform these amazing sex acts in front of the camera.

NC Why did I know there would be sex involved? (Laughter)

EP There were superimposed images, coloured filters. You get these close-ups of genitalia...

AD So why does Phil like this?

EP I don't know why Phil was attracted to it. (General laughter)

AD Doesn't sound like Phil's cup of tea at all.

NC Phil's a terrible wanker!

EP He's an underground hero. And so prolific. And engaged in secret activities.

NC His more secret activities may have something to do with underground cinema. In the privacy of his own home! He is, he is. Again, he moved to Leeds like it was this little Mecca or something. He was living in Stoke, which was so desperate. And again, him living in Leeds has meant he's been able to pull a band together, which has been really good for him and his music. Maybe another city wouldn't allow him to do that. Like Manchester is our close cousin, but nothing happens there.

AD Nothing seems to. Not that we've noticed.

NC You go to gigs there and there's like ten people there. It's a weird old thing.

EP Now, you got invited to this Julian Cope thing festival. Rome wasn't burned in a day.

NC Hey, why didn't you come to that? We could have slung you on the guest list. No we couldn't actually. They were swines at that venue.

EP I heard about it. You were on the bill with Sunn O))).

AD We weren't on that bill.

NC No, for three nights it was Cope and a freak support band, which I think he wanted just to inflict on his fans. So there was Sunburned Hand, and us, and Sunn O))).

EP Does Cope actually care for your music?

NC Sure, totally. That's how we...there was just direct communication with him. He was saying nice things about us. He got a bunch of our records. We got in touch. Then he's writing about us. He's really nice. He's super-enthusiastic. He's genuinely into it... And he sorted us out this gig. It was all right...the venue was...

EP The Hammersmith Odeon, was it?

NC No, it was the Lyric Theatre. Quite fun. It was nice. He's into it. I don't know.

EP Has it led to other things?

NC Er, no.

EP How did your music go down with an audience of Cope fans?

AD Not very well I think.

NC I don't know. There was applause at the end, but you can never tell.

AD Cope fans seem to be pretty single-minded. They just seem to be totally into him, don't they. Devoted.

NC I can imagine there's a peripheral bunch of Cope fans who are interested in the sort of music he may be interested in. And if he says you should check out Les Rallizes Denudes, they'll go and check that out, and they'll either like it or not. And they're fairly open-minded. But I wandered in for about ten minutes when he was playing, and it was the weirdest gig I've ever been to. It was like a religious convention. He was in the theatre. He was playing this pretty heavy kind of Stooges rock, and he had a radio mike and he was jumping into the stalls. And there was a whole bunch of people in their late thirties and early forties who looked like they'd just come from the office, and a few token Goths, going nuts!

AD It was great!

NC It was the closest I've come to going to some sort of religious cult thing. His audience were terrifying. Metal fans have got nothing on those people! They're so pent up, probably. Their youth's twenty years behind them.

EP What a strange phenomenon. I've never figured out the appeal of Cope. I don't mind The Teardrop Explodes, but his solo stuff.

NC Well, they go totally nuts for him. Ahh – they weren't polite.

EP I saw one gig when he was in between Coil and Ash Ra Tempel.

NC Not physically?!

EP Yes. It was a really fleshy, visceral experience. But your appearance with Cope hasn't led to lucrative things of any sort?

NC No, no. It's kind of nice to be able to quote Cope, if someone asks you for a press release. I can just say Cope's written about us, go look it up on his website...

AD I like his writing, actually. I like his reviews. On the website.

NC I really enjoyed the first volume of his autobiography, Head-On. I thought it was the best book about punk rock ever written. Thought it was really good.

(An announcement comes over the tannoy about a Keiji Haino discussion).

NC I'd rather be sitting there watching Julian Cope than Keiji Haino. Tough call. I don't really like sitting still for much.

EP Do you want to go and listen to that?

NC No! (Laughs) Would you like a beer Ed?

(One long sozzled and aimless chat later...)

EP I wasn't recording any of that.

NC Shame.

EP I can't be bothered transcribing all of that!

NC Now the meanest thing an interviewer can do is refuse to interview you face to face, and do it over the e-mail, so they don't have to transcribe it. That's totally mean!

EP Well, I'm sorry but I have done interviews that way.

NC It's fair enough if you're doing someone in another continent.

EP Well, I try my best.

NC I have transcribed interviews myself. It's nightmarish, totally nightmarish.

EP Do you feel that the Vibracathedral Orchestra have reached a plateau of recognition beyond which you cannot get?

AD Don't know.

NC No way. I think we could be the biggest band in the universe. No, of course not. I don't care. Nah, it just surprises me how many people can get into this stuff these days. People's ears are different than what they used to be.

AD We've been going a long time now.

NC I keep waiting for Sophie Coppola to phone us up and say, 'do you want to do a soundtrack'. It's not out of the realms of possibility. Is it? You know what I'm saying? Not that we're soundtrack musicians. I keep expecting Jools Holland to phone us up and say 'come on to our show'. I don't know what I'm expecting. We just do our own thing. It surprises us when we get asked to play at places like this. And it's funny to us. We don't have a manager. We don't push ourselves. If we were bothered, if I was ten years younger, I might push it a bit. We might go on tour more. From my point of view I can't go on tour, because I've got to stay at home and look after the kids.

EP Let's put it another way. What is the fulfilment quotient that you're getting from doing this? Why do you like music? Why do you like doing it?

AD Because we play good music. That's the bottom line. 'Cause it's good. We get a really good vibration.

NC Yes, because why we're doing a gig like this I guess –

AD It's good fun.

NC It's fun, rolling into another town like a gang. There's an element of vanity in playing for people like this. And it's good when people come up to you and shake your hand afterwards. You've touched them, or something. Because we think what we do is pretty good, when it's good.

EP How do you think you've touched them? What is it that's reaching to them?

NC Because it makes them happy, hopefully. I think we play happy music. The notes we use, I guess, ring within you with happiness, or something. We use really obvious fifths, you know? Our whole set is built on a fifth. Like a chord. You subject yourself to that for long enough, if it's mellow it'll make you feel mellow. If it's full-on, it'll make you feel excited or...

EP So, you know about fifths? That's a musical structure.

AD I don't! I don't know what he's talking about!

NC Adam knows so much more about music than me. His fingers know so much more about music than my fingers will ever know. I just mean obvious chords. We're just like one big power chord.

EP It's not a minor chord.

NC No, and it's not major either. Could go either way. It's a big power chord. What we're playing is this power chord. I just want to make people feel happy and excited, and put something good in the world, I guess. It's not why I do it. I do it because I feel compelled to do it. The reason I tack on afterwards.

AD I think with bands like us, when it works, it's like better than seeing a band where it's all rehearsed and you know what to expect. When it works, you're involved with it because it's happening there and then...

NC That's it!

AD ...it might not work every time, but when it does the audience is more a part of it than when they are watching a band where it all starts and stops together.

EP So you're putting yourselves on the edge a lot more.

NC But you see, we don't think of it that way. But I guess we are.

AD Well, yeah.

NC Just because we don't know any different. We're stupid. It's our folly that we think we can stumble into places and just play a bunch of noise that pleases us, and people won't lynch us. So far, no-one has lynched us! So, I guess, we're OK! In the eighties, sure. We were lynched all the time!

AD (to EP) You were saying you don't like Sunburned Hand of The Man, but I've seen them when they were absolutely amazing. And that's the risk you get, that is the risk. They can fail. But when it's good, it's better than the majority of bands, better than anything, because it's happening there on the stage, right in front of your eyes.

EP Well, that's not only rare in music. That's rare in modern life. So much of modern life has been mapped out for us the same way.

NC Yeah, but there are loads of people bubbling under, that are kind of on our wavelength. More so than since I can remember. I've been around a while. How old are you, Ed?

EP I'm 44.

NC I'm 39, so we lived through horror of the eighties. We survived. That's all I want to say, you know?

EP I agree that we're spoiled for choice these days. There's a lot of good stuff to choose from.

NC It's great. I've got a downer on loads of stuff, but...anyway I feel very optimistic and good.

EP Must be listening to your own music makes you that way. Because of all those fifths.

NC Yeah. Power chords, you know!

(Adam leaves for a cigarette)

NC That must be the first interview Adam's ever done. There's nothing to it! He's notoriously taciturn. □

www.vibracathedral.co.uk

Phil Todd / Ashtray Navigations

"It's about making something beautiful"

THE SOUND PROJECTOR IS PLEASED to present this exclusive interview with Phil Todd, the first major interview with the man behind Ashtray Navigations. If you're a regular reader you'll know that we have regularly given favourable notice to records issued under his name since 1998 onwards. I have no idea how they started arriving here, but it's good that they did. Indeed when I recently 'curated' this zone of my CD collection, I found that the package of one of my Ashtray Navigations CD was decaying to the extent that toner from the photocopied artwork was migrating onto the surface of the disc! (As an archivist I should know about these things…) Luckily this toner-rot does not affect play (yet), but the hapless incident made me think I'd been taking the work of Phil Todd somewhat for granted. You can't simply pick up a replacement copy of these (now rare) small-press items, some of which are already 7-8 years old, and were hard enough to snag even back then. In fact some of them even turn up on eBay these days. It troubles me that this work remains so inaccessible, especially when I want more of it.

From Jack Smith's *Flaming Creatures*

After a certain point there seemed be a lull in his activities, but lately Ashtray is/are back on the 'scene' with a new flurry of releases, once again from his lucrative international deals, and live appearances all over the UK – although probably mostly in Leeds. I have yet to see him perform live, having missed my chance at the Gateshead Festival, Music Lover's Field Companion, in May 2005. Although not on the official published lineup, Todd joined as a late arrival along with a host of other UK 'underground' greats, including Vibracathedral Orchestra and Jazzfinger. To compensate for this, and to try and convey the live experience that is Ashtray, I present a few photographs courtesy of photographer Marg Bancewicz. As you can see this is a recent incarnation of Ashtray as a 'band'.

However most of the records have been released as solo efforts, the result of Todd painstakingly overdubbing himself and working with complicated live-tape set ups (the details of which remain trade secrets), thus providing showcases for his lengthy and monotonous semi-psychedelic guitar workouts. Almost every release ends up droney and hypnotic, but also totally different to all the others. Another strong feature, which almost everyone notices who ever heard a Phil Todd record, is the use of degraded cassette tapes and faulty equipment for playback/recording, to create additional exciting effects. At time of *Four Raga Moods*, he wrote: 'I like to mess around with the recording quality to try and erase the origins of the recording, so that the listener won't be able to readily identify the sound sources.'

As Phil reveals in this interview, the inspiration for this approach comes not exclusively from music, but from the world of avant-garde cinema, specifically the work of the blighted US underground visionary, Jack Smith, whose amazing life and work simply beggar belief. Not a bad role model for anyone to adopt – and far more imaginative and unusual than aping the usual 'rock' suspects like Jim Morrison, Syd Barrett or Iggy Pop. Todd is something of an aficionado of this line of film-making. I remember he met up with me once in London and, on his recommendation, saw the film *Christmas on Earth* by Barbara Rubin. I know I'll never forget it.

Another great record released under his aegis was 1999's *Anna Planeta* double-CD set. It seemed to have an aura of mystery as I recall from the descriptions and press releases written about it at the time. 'The sacred meets the very profane', wrote Todd. Certainly it's a fabulous piece of music and deserves a double-LP release, if not an entire box set of all the 'unreleased sessions'. This is one of my favourite records from 'that' period, a late 1990s time of interesting experimentation among UK indie-ish scenes which as it turns out seems to have been hanging by the skin of its teeth. Why these talents haven't flourished the way that their USA counterparts are currently doing is a bit of a mystery to me. The Americans are making the most of recent technology like CDRs and the Internet, as well as the more 'traditional' forms like photocopying, cassettes and good old word-of-mouth, to cause great stirs of excitement wherever they go. We can of course thank Phil Todd again for 'doing his bit' at a time when he did, being the mastermind behind the record label and distribution service, Betley Welcomes Careful Drivers. Anyone who ever bought a record or cassette through reading those tattily-printed circulars which Phil used to send out always remembers the occasion with a misty eye.

Phil found it was not possible to sustain running BWCD, due to many factors – you can imagine it's a pretty thankless task, and certainly not one that leads to financial aggrandisement. But it's better now that he's devoting all his energy to his art. The 'new batch' of recordings, proving that he never really went away in the first place, sound ten times as exciting and full of renewed energy. The collaborations he is forging with the weird and wonderful talented musicians he meets are inspiring. In interview you will notice various references to said musicians and names which are simply beyond me. The early part of the conversation involved Phil expressing disbelief that I hadn't heard of half of the bands that to him were simply common knowledge; he proceeded to upbraid and humiliate me about it

for several minutes, proffering yet more obscurities with which to catch me out. As if this wasn't enough, you'll notice how his fine mind instantly decodes my questions and exposes the weakness in my arguments, seeking out where I've made the wrong choice of words. This was rather disconcerting and evidence both of his intelligence and speedy wit, and perhaps my own lazy thinking…anyway read on.

Interview conducted by telephone on 16th June 2005

PT = Phil Todd
EP = Ed Pinsent

Ashtray on stage. Photo: Marg Bancewicz

EP How much time can you spare me?

PT Oh, loads. I've got enough things to say. If you can be arsed to listen to me babbling on. I could go on forever. I've never been interviewed as Ashtray before. This is the first one in eleven years. I've done a few things where people have e-mailed me questions and I've sent off the answers and then never seen the results. But this is the first ever Ashtray interview.

EP Ashtray Navigations is a band now, I gather.

PT It was always just me. The records still are. But it was a band with one member. Yes, I never really played live all that much until I came to Leeds. There was never really anywhere to play in Stoke where I was. So I got people helping and collaborating, participants and things like that. Other people play on some of the tracks, but I always overdub it with loads of things, and I always do the final mix. But there's other people involved now.

EP Who did you play with at Gateshead, for example?

PT That was with Melanie Delaney, who's in a band called Sculptress, with a bunch of people. Did you ever meet Joincey? The other guy in Inca Eyeball. He was in Quoits as well. They were a bunch of people who were involved in A Warm Palindrome. Melanie Delaney is in a band with all those folks called Sculptress as well. Sculptress are really, really good. And Ben Reynolds, who's doing a load of solo things that you might not have heard of. He played London last week. He was with Marissa Nadler. The other collaborator at the Gateshead gig was Alex Nielsen, who you must have heard of, because he's getting his name about quite a lot. He's playing with Jandek. His band Scatter who were reviewed in your last issue as well. Scatter are good. He's the drummer, and does percussion, and he does a lot of singing as well and all kinds of things. He used to live in Leeds and I used to do various improvising things with him in Leeds, and he's got kind of drafted into Ashtray. Really nice guy and a really good musician.

EP So you're on guitars, then there's this drummer...

PT Yeah, I was playing the karaoke machine as well and a load of percussion things. A keyboard. There's all kinds of crap. General charity shop instruments, mostly. Mel was playing keyboards through an old tape delay and Ben was playing, he's got a load of Walkmans which he connects to a mixing desk, edits and mixes different tapes down. Also he can shout into the microphones of the recording Walkman, and manipulate that. I'm giving all the secrets away now! I'd better shut up! And Alex usually does various percussiony things. So that was the band for Gateshead. And an unannounced guest vocalist, as well! (Laughs)

EP So someone in the audience seized the microphone.

PT That happens a lot. We seem to get a lot of people who want to join in, either by telling us how bad we are, or by [saying] 'it's really cosmic, man! Yeah! You like Hawkwind!' And all that kind of thing. I don't know, it seems to have happened to us more than anybody. We get it quite a lot...always!

EP How annoying. You even hear about it in the old days of AMM. This is some people's idea of audience participation. They think it's free music, so anything goes...

PT It's not so much that. It's usually people who we've offended, because we're usually really fucking loud! Or at least that's the intention to be loud. Yeah, it's gotta be loud! It's sometimes quite abrasive. I don't know why it is. Obviously we're not big celebs. Like, he wouldn't dare do it during Jandek because he'd probably get shot by the people who ran the Gateshead thing!

EP I only just discovered Jazzfinger. They were very good in Gateshead, I thought. A short set, really fine. Then they gave me this lathe-cut record they've done which is really nice.

PT I must admit I haven't heard them for years. I used to have a CD by them, which I don't have any more. I don't really know them, but I know people who know them. Never had many dealings. I might have spoke to one of them once. Quite like to hear what they're up to now because I've heard it's dead good. They might be playing here on Saturday, because Bridget from Vibracathedral's doing her art show. Maybe you've heard about this. She's doing her final show in a church in Leeds. We're playing and various Vibracathedral spin-offs. The First Astral Social Club Show, which I'm looking forward to. Sculptress are playing. But I think Jazzfinger might be playing as well, so maybe I'll get to see them.

EP We're still on question one...there's some very good collaborations on the Cigar record you did. A fine record.

PT It's OK. It's kind of old. I haven't heard it for a long time, and it was a long time in gestation, that one.

EP It included a very good collaboration between you and a piano player.

PT Yeah. She couldn't play piano for a long time after that. She got RSI. She fucked her hands up playing some Rachmaninoff piece. I think she's playing again now. She's got a band locally called Sierpinski, and I think they're starting to do stuff again. They're really good. And also Matt Robson, who plays laptop on that record, is in that band as well. He does stuff under the name Random Number, which is kind of more electronica I suppose you'd call it.

EP How do you manage to attract these wonderful people to your beacon of music?

PT It's just people I was hanging around with in Leeds at the time. Those two. Chloe's on that record as well. She and a friend of hers came to an Ashtray gig and really liked it and bought the record. I saw them again at a gig afterwards and just got talking. 'Do you two play instruments by any chance, because I'm looking for some new people to play with?' They said 'Yeah!' They were both really young, they were both teenagers. The guy, he was named Miles, he never turned up. I don't know what happened to him. Which was a shame, because he was quite an interesting character. Chloe's got her own band now called Miss Sojourn. I have to make loads of plugs for these people, because they're really, really good.

EP So it's a case of you just spotting somebody and thinking you could do something musical.

PT Well, yeah. It was somebody who liked it and said they liked it! Because usually when you play live, you either get some twat making an exhibition of himself at the front, or you get complete indifference. Usually when somebody says they like it, I always

make sure I speak to them, just because it's also nice to find out why, things like that. So that was the people I was playing music with at that time. I might do some more stuff with all these people, I might not. I don't know. I'm kind of happy with the band as it is at the moment. So I'm not really looking for more collaborators, although I think some more may be in the offing at some stage. It's an all Stoke-on-Trent band as well at the moment, which is very...(laughs). Ben's from Stoke originally. He's in York now. Mel lived in Stoke for quite a while, because she was a student there. Alex has nothing to do with Stoke, so I don't know what I'm talking about really. But it's a mostly Stoke-on-Trent band! Well, it still kind of is a solo project.

EP How long have you been going?

PT 1994, I started. January 1994. A very precise date. I had kind of like a sampling band. A friend had a computer and we sampled a bunch of records. It was kind of part music, part comedy. As was Ashtray, at the time! Maybe it still is.

EP This was something you did outside of Ashtray, then.

PT Before, before. I messed around playing music all my life really, but I never had any proper instruments. I never had any money for a nice guitar or a big amp or anything, so I was always playing shitty keyboards or tape recorders or whatever. And I just did this thing with a couple of friends where we sat around the computer and sampled. I suppose it was like V/VM, or Stock Hausen and Walkman. That kind of thing, you know, early Negativland. Just sampling people talking off the television and things like that. But I bought a cheap four-track off somebody and decided to do Ashtray about 1994.

EP And what was your approach at the time?

PT Basically I had to come up with something for what I had, which was very little. I had a broken guitar, no amp, couple of effects pedals, load of Casio kind of jobs. Just like junk, basically. Crappy bongos...toy flutes...and it was like, what can I do with all this stuff? At the time I was listening a lot of old psychedelic stuff, which I've always loved. And I was also listening to noise and power electronics. It was basically my thought that if I could combine the two, mix a little MB-type instrumental power electronics and psychedelic music, which was I thought I could do with what I had, and what I liked and what I wanted to listen to. So that was the concept at the beginning. Of course, it's drifted on since then, but that was the original idea.

EP. Did you find you mastered the four-track equipment quite easily?

PT I could do something with it, but it was shit! It cost 25 quid, It never worked properly. It kept distorting. It just sounded really, really, really bad. Which I guess is the kind of thing you need to do power electronics and psychedelic music really, isn't it? A shit 25-quid four-track that doesn't work properly! A record eventually came out, but about a million cassettes came out before. We were on the cassette level.

EP Did you have your own label then?

PT Betley Welcomes Careful Drivers was going then. Betley started around 1991. BWCD predates Ashtray. I put some things out on Betley, and also there was some cool folks who we knew had tape labels. Like Oska from Brighton, who was just an amazing guy. Jod, who was putting out a load of tapes that were really good. We sent a load of stuff to him, and tapes by T-Culture as well. That was the name of the sampling man. We did a collaboration with Merzbow eventually. I guess that was our highest profile release, which I think Stefan Jaworzyn described in his catalogue as 'easily the worst of the Merzbow collaborations'. Thanks, Stefan! He's such a kind reviewer, you know. Stuff came out on Betley and all these other little tape labels which were going at that time.

EP In the 1990s, was there still much of a cassette scene?

PT Well kind of, and oddly enough what got me into it was the whole Riot Grrl thing. That's kind of a forgotten chapter of musical history. I was well into that. It's kind of been rewritten as pre-Sleater-Kinney. I kind of like some of that stuff, but it's basically girls with guitars who are in a standard rock band.

EP Along with Riot Grrl, there were a lot of fanzines I noticed.

PT Yeah, yeah, it was a whole culture. A mini-punk explosion round about 1991, 1992-ish. Even the NME would go, 'Hey yeah! Doesn't matter if you've not got any instruments! You can have a recorder and a delay pedal and a Casio, and you'll do a cassette and you can do it!'

EP I remember seeing Skinned Teen.

PT They were great, yeah! They couldn't play for shit! And they didn't care! They were fantastic. But there were all kinds of other ones which never made any records, they would just do tapes. And that was kind of what got me into it. I've got to say round about that time there was an event of enormous cultural importance which has also kind of been forgotten, which is the release of *Twin Infinitives* by Royal Trux. That's a real biggie for Ashtray, and probably loads of other people as well.

EP That's a great record. Why was it significant in your eyes?

PT It's just a crazy collage of junk. An old moog and toy flutes and all kinds of crap. But it seemed really well thought out. There was a real kind of direction to it. And it was still a rock and roll record. I

Detail of stage equipment.
Photo: Marg Bancewicz

always say that it's the only horrible noise freak-out record, the kind of record your parents and everybody will hate, but you can sing along to every song on it. Each time you hear it you can sing along to all those songs. There's a real direction to it. This could be done! You could make a rock and roll record and not have to have a guitar and a big amp and not have to learn all the chord changes. There were a lot of people doing noise tapes around that time, but they didn't have that rock-blues feel that record had, and also the first Royal Trux record. A load of other things I was discovering at the same time, like *Torch Of The Mystics*, that Sun City Girls record, that was a big one as well. Also listening to a lot of free jazz, Japanese noise and things like that. But I'd say that Royal Trux record was a big, big factor.

EP Did you also think that because Royal Trux could appear on a fairly good [mainstream] label and maybe attract an audience, did you think that you stood a chance of getting an audience as well?

PT Hmm! I think they only had an audience because one of them was in Pussy Galore at that stage. Don't forget they weren't signed to a major then. I thin *Twin Infinitives* is maybe the first LP on Drag City. I could be wrong. But it wasn't a label that had any reputation at that time. So no, not really. I always loved Pussy Galore, but at the time Jon Spencer's solo stuff was getting the attention. A friend sent me the first Royal Trux record. He said 'this is terrible. You might like it. This is an absolutely terrible record!' And people had the same reaction to *Twin Infinitives* as well. After hearing that first record, I sent away for *Twin Infinitives* from America. You couldn't really get it over here. So no, not really. I can't say I've ever done it to get an audience and all that. Obviously, I wouldn't mind having an audience, it would be a nice thing. But I've actually no idea how to go about it.

EP Also *Twin Infinitives* has been described as a drug record, hasn't it?

PT Yeah. Some interview with them, they were talking about how they give everything the road test and take their drugs in different combinations. They were saying the best one for that [record] is pot and LSD. I was never really a major druggie. I never got into the heroin-chic side of it. I think that's why they became popular, because of playing off that whole 'we're smackheads' image.

EP So how did you get from cassettes to releasing an LP?

PT I did a seven-inch. I think I was doing two seven-inches at once. One being a collaboration between T Culture and Smell and Quim, which I knew I could sell. I was friends with the Smell and Quim guys, which at that stage was Dave Walker and Neil Campbell. He probably might mind admitting in print that he was in that band, but he was! I interviewed Neil for *Opprobrium*. It was Dee Foist, not Neil Campbell. So I did an Ashtray seven-inch, just did 200 and thought maybe I could sell these. And it went really well and I sold them all really quickly. It got a really good review in *Your Flesh* magazine. Tom Lax from Siltbreeze sent me a letter saying that he'd got a copy and really liked it, then two days later he sent me another letter saying do you want to do an LP? And that was the first record. I thought, 'Oh yeah, I'm onto it now, I'm onto a good thing here.' Siltbreeze was the hippest label in the US. I did one record for them but nobody really bought it. It got a bunch of bad reviews.

EP What was the name of that LP?

PT Oh god! *Ashtray Navigations Use Copenhagen 69 Guitars and Park Drive Circular Effects Pedals Exclusively*. I could tell the full story behind that title, but it's much more fun to imagine it. It's five stories all put together. I could tell you if you want but it's not that interesting really. It would spoil people's fun. That was the first [record]. And then there was the split with Universal Indians, and a couple of CDs that I put out myself.

EP This was when compact discs started to become affordable to produce.

PT Yeah, Not that affordable though. Compared with what it costs now to do one, the first two compact discs that I did on Betley cost an absolute fortune.

EP What was it like to run a record label? What are the problems in doing it?

PT It was pre-Internet days when I started, so everything was really, really slow.

EP In terms of the material that you stocked, did you feel you were doing a service for the music community?

PT I hadn't a fucking clue what I was doing. You've got some idiot from Stoke-on-Trent with no business sense whatsoever, selling unlistenable music by the most obscure artists ever known, and you're dealing with people who've got no business sense whatsoever and don't know what an invoice is. And having to get catalogues printed. Somebody I knew, whose name I'd better not say because he's still working there, was printing the catalogues at his place of work and sending them to me. The whole thing was just held together with sellotape basically.

Ashtray on stage. Photo; Marg Bancewicz

EP But you managed to sustain it for a few years at least.

PT Yeah, it did quite well for a time. I'd do the catalogues and get quite a few orders. It would do all right for a while. But gradually I lost interest, sales dropped off, and I moved to Leeds and I was paying a lot of rent. It was just untenable to carry on doing it. I'd lost interest in the music as well. It seemed that a lot of the bands that I really, really liked had either gone in directions that I didn't care for...a lot of new noise stuff was done with people doing it on laptops, which I never really saw the point of, and the results weren't interesting to listen to. People were sending me dire things. I just completely lost interest really.

EP When did you feel the rot setting in?

PT Around the turn of the millennium, I reckon. It would have been much better for music if the millennium bug really had fucked up all those laptops!

EP Did you lean towards distributing the sort of music that you personally liked?

PT I wanted to, yes. It was done, I'd print up my own releases, and it was whoever I could trade them with. I'd sell whatever they were trying to push on me, basically. That's basically the way it was done. There was a few things that I'd buy in if I was excited about something and wanted a copy for myself. That soon dropped off!

EP In a way you were parleying your own releases into something you could sell.

PT Yeah. I had no distribution. I think my runaway mouth had a lot to do with it as well. I tended to slag people off to their face, being an angry young man and all the rest of it. I think that put the spanner in a few works for me. I've still got a tendency to do that, I have to say. So we never had any distribution to speak of, really.

EP Even These Records has given up.

PT Really? Those guys...I really despair of the English music industry. Maybe it's getting better now. But all of that academic improv, Recommended Records scene, obviously they weren't gonna be interested in what we were doing, so I never had any distribution from them. So it was a struggle. It was kind of fun, though, at the same time.

EP I think it is something to be proud of. There weren't that many people doing what you did then. I always think it's very hard for this kind of music to get any kind of a foothold anywhere, and when you turn out to be the only chance that somebody stands of buying and hearing this record, that's not a bad thing.

PT Absolutely, yeah. But I'm glad I'm not doing it any more! I'm more into just doing Ashtray. It's like all the spin-off bands and all the other bands that I used to have, when I was doing all these ad-hoc improv things with loads of people. There's a whole ton of them, just a million Stoke bands. I did it for a while when I was in Leeds as well, but I kind of lost interest in all that. Even attempting to make some inroads into the free improv thing, because I was interested in playing it, but I realised I was no good at it. A lot of other people could do more than me, and I couldn't really tell a good improvisation from a bad one. Is there meant to be? Are you meant to tell a good improvisation from a bad one? Is there meant to be criteria? I still actually listen to a lot of that stuff.

EP Who were you playing with?

PT There was one, I did a gig with Paul Hession, a Leeds improv guy. It was good to do, he was really good, but I don't think I was that good. I was shitting myself, I felt like a fraud! I never really went too far down that route.

EP I don't know. I could see you doing an Ascension type of thing.

PT Hmmm! No, because then I could go into doing a Velvets riff or some kind of Sabbath-y thing. Could it not be an ironic quote? That whole Zorn thing, where you play an ironic country song. I didn't really care for that. I just wanted to play rock and roll really. I've never really thought of [my music] as being anything like that too much. I quite like Ascension. They played their first gig for about five years in Leeds a couple of years ago, and they were great.

EP Do you feel more assured and confident of your musical identity now?

PT (Laughs) Yeah. I don't operate on a high level of self-confidence anyway, but people have been saying nice things about what I've been doing recently, and that's always an impetus to do more. I think it fits in a bit better as well now, with David Keenan doing his mail order thing [Volcanic Tongue], it kind of fits in with what he's doing. Apparently the Ashtray stuff's been going quite well there recently. Also it's been better finding people to play with as well, because more people have heard...you know, people who are doing similar, not doing the same kind of thing, but people who are thinking along similar lines, ie the Finnish lot, Avarus and all those guys, Vibracathedral, Charalambides. They've got more of a profile now, and people aren't completely mystified by what I do. I feel an affinity with all those guys. I've met Lasse Marhaug a few times. I don't thing he's got much of an affinity with what Ashtray's doing. I like his stuff, although I haven't heard anything for years. We did do a collaboration actually, which I might reissue at some stage. The Zen Nuns! It needs more work I think. It came out as a limited cassette, but I'd like to do more work on it and maybe put it out at some stage. I haven't heard from Lasse for years. He's a great fellow. The Zen Nuns thing was released by Rob Hayler. Fencing Flatworm. He's stopped doing that, but you can't do things forever, unless you're completely mad like me.

EP Have you ever played in Europe at all?

PT Belgium, once. And God, that was shit! I'd like to maybe do more of that in the next few years, but now there's three of us and we've got a load of equipment. None of us have got any money and we all live in different cities. We've got to have some kind of guarantee that we'll get paid and that all the costs will be covered. I really need to get the right offer before I'll do it.

EP Do you find venues in England quite depressing?

PT No, not at all. Venues in England are usually pubs, and I find pubs quite the opposite of depressing usually. I don't really know any different so I'm not sure. I haven't really...that Gateshead thing, that's the first time I've ever played any kind of festival, I usually play in toilets, the shitty back rooms of pubs. It was a nice change. Being shouted at by a drunken idiot in a posh arts centre, rather than upstairs in a pub! A nice change!

EP Can you tell me the story behind Anna Planeta, or is that a secret?

PT I can tell you the story behind Anna Planeta. There's quite a few good stories. I was friends with this guy Dan who lives near Alton Towers amusement park. And he was a photographer who wanted to be a film-maker. I think he might well be in Poland right now, making some kind of documentary about Roman Polanski. But don't quite me on that, because it might not be happening. He's another character I need to try and get back in contact with. He discovered this abandoned Catholic school near Alton Towers, and was going there and taking photos, and a few of us were going down there to have a look at it. I was thinking this would be fucking great for recording in. Everything was destroyed, all the windows were through, the rooms were massive, and there were different rooms with different kinds of reverb. So we thought we'll just do some recording there. It was a big thing to play in a room that big and to hear that reverberation. And I think doing that changed Ashtray. There was a lot more space in the Ashtray stuff after I did the Anna Planeta stuff with Dan and Andy and the other people who were involved in that.

EP So it was a live recording pretty much?

PT Oh totally, yeah. It's just live to a digital cassette. Most of it is just playing things that we found in there. We'd bring a few instruments, but there was no electricity, so we'd just bring Casios with batteries, various acoustic things, and just use a piece of wood and bits of junk that we'd find in there. We were eventually turned out of there by the police, because this little old lady who lived by said she'd seen Satanists with musical instruments, going in there! And the police came and chucked us out of there.

EP Really! What made her think you were Satanists?

PT I don't know, but there was some kind of dodgy activity going on in there. Because there was one room which I think Dan said had allegedly been used for Satanic rituals, and there was a big pentagram spray-painted in green on the floor there. But there was also the word 'OZ' spray-painted in the same green right next to it, which made me think they weren't extremely serious Satanists! That was 'The Galley', you know the first track on there, it was like a boat with the creaking. It was the old library of the place, and we were all in there for that one. So that was the one we dubbed 'The Galley'.

EP Somehow that record always sounds to me like it was recorded at night. Was it?

PT No, not at all. I wouldn't particularly care to go there at night. There was all kinds of glue-sniffing teenagers and some great graffiti in there. We didn't find needles there, but we certainly found remnants of excessive cider consumption lying around the place! I wouldn't really have cared to go there at night, we could have met some trouble. So we went there during the day, Sundays mostly. It was done over a couple of months. It was going to be a triple CD originally, but I didn't have any money. That first track 'The Galley' really needed to go on a CD by itself. We had some other tracks, some of which came out on that Fat Cat thing, and some of which we never released. And unfortunately the CDR technology being what it was meant that the masters have deteriorated. So it's gonna be lost forever. I've still got the digital cassette. Some of them play, and I've now got another digital cassette player, so I might be able to retrieve some of it at some stage.

EP And with that release, the pressing went slightly wrong didn't it?

PT Yeah. We had it pressed in America where it was cheaper, and a load of them got damaged in transit. It's not a major calamity, because I still haven't sold all the copies of that.

EP I'm surprised to hear that. I thought there'd be loads of interest!

PT Nah, not at all. It's the worst-selling Fat Cat release, is that split 12-inch. Fat Cat occasionally send me royalty statements. It's a big line of zeroes. The name Anna Planeta is from *Sweet Movie*. Me and Dan were both big fans of his stuff and that film was kind of a good one, and we thought we'd better call it something which would throw people off the scent. So giving it the name of a person...Anna Planeta was the Marxist prostitute who was also a murderer this film *Sweet Movie*, which is a good one should you ever get a chance to see it.

EP You're quite a fan of underground cinema. I never get a chance to see much of them these days though.

PT Only on UbuWeb and file-sharing programmes, and Leeds film festival. There's quite a few things actually, quite a few people who are into things like that. There's been some nice screenings, hopefully there's going to be a bit more of it soon. I like all that stuff. I'd say that seeing *Flaming Creatures*, the Jack Smith film, was a major, major influence on Ashtray as well. Absolutely.

EP Why is that, then? You mean the records he used as source music?

PT No, just the deterioration of the image, and how it makes it so much more beautiful. Because I was dealing with shitty equipment, and obviously Jack Smith was dealing with shitty equipment, and the way he did it was to make it look even more shitty. And all of a sudden there's like a dream-like vapour. You're basically using out of date film stock, and a camera which doesn't work too well, and you don't really know what you're doing, and half the cast don't know what they're doing, but it's turned into big plusses. It looks really dream-like because of the technical limitations. I took it all a bit too literally. I went rummaging around looking for really old cassette tapes to record on, things like that, to try and replicate that kind of effect. Then I got really heavily into Jack Smith, trying to read everything he'd written. I still think he's one of the best, one of my favourite artists of the last century. Also his whole approach to how art should be done, what art should be under Capitalism, and the relations between art and commerce. Coming from somebody who had no money and wasn't connected to the middle-class improv scene and all the rest of it, I was in kind of a similar position to the one that he was working from. I was a big fan. And also, in *Flaming Creatures*, you've got basically some kind of dream-like spin on classic, mythic 1920s Hollywood. Kind of a parody of this mouldy, dissolving, rotten, past its sell-by date myth of old Hollywood. And I was doing a similar thing, or so I thought,

so I hoped, on late 1960s rock. I think you can definitely see, it's definitely there. I wasn't conscious of it at the time. A lot of the people who were around in that underground era had similar kind of ideas. Some low-budget film that would try to be what classic Hollywood said it was going to be, and then copped out. But doing it on a minuscule budget. Also the fact that it was so anonymous. A lot of the films at that London thing, a lot of them didn't even have titles. This beautiful thing that I've made, I'm not going to put my name on it. My name, until recently, never went on any of the Ashtray things. Because it's not about me standing on the chair going everybody look at me, I'm an artist. It's about making something beautiful. So that was a big influence.

EP There's affection as well. You love the music you're parodying.

PT Completely. It wasn't a deconstruction. I wasn't taking these things apart in order to show that they're politically incorrect, or they're bad in any way. It was showing that these things can be a generator of dreams. Surrealism, that's a big influence as well. I was really into Surrealism when I was at school, reading books about Surrealism. The Dadaists, but mainly the early Surrealists. That kind of gets me [disturbed], because a lot of times when musicians talk about Surrealism they just mean putting a daft hat on and singing about herrings, or doing the whole Nurse With Wound schtick, which I'm not a big fan of. But there's a lot of things in Surrealism which are useful for music. Things like the found object, frottages and textures to stimulate some kind of dream state, things like that which have never really been explored in music.

EP Would you align yourself with that part of Surrealism that attempts to stimulate and replicate the subconscious and the dreamlike state?

PT I wouldn't like to put a name on it and call it the subconscious, because then you've painted yourself into a Freudian corner. So I wouldn't like to say that, but the dream-state, yeah. Definitely. And how it interacts with reality, the shadow between them, the dialectic between them. I don't actually sit down and say, I shall now do a piece which will illustrate the dialectic between them! But that comes out of listening to it, thinking about what I've just done. All of these things that I talk about, it's all tools to be used to make the music. They're not dogmas to subscribe to. They're all tools that you can use. That anybody can use. Anybody can do music using found objects and things like that. A lot of the Surrealist games are really good triggers for any kind of creative activity. You're not necessarily going to come out with something that looks like a Dali painting or what people accept as Surrealism, but you're using their kind of methods. It's a good creative arsenal. Have I answered the question? What was the question, anyway?

EP I was interested in your idea that the underground film-makers were actually trying to do what Hollywood failed to do, and that's certainly true about Kenneth Anger.

PT Totally, yeah. I don't know how conscious Kenneth Anger was that he isn't a Hollywood film-maker. I don't know. I like his work a lot. Wish he'd do something else before he's off the planet completely. I'm sure he could get funding, but I guess he's done his work.

EP So with your music, are you trying to get back to a stage as though psychedelia hadn't gone wrong with, say, Jim Morrison. Getting back to a more innocent state.

PT I think Jim Morrison was all right. He wasn't a great poet, but he was a brilliant rock star. He set the mould for everything a rock star should be, I think. Plus, with The Doors you get into French symbolism, there's a lot of advanced jazz stuff referenced in The Doors. I think they're a really inspirational band. Later on, when Morrison turned into a drunken fat bloke and just churned out a bunch of bad blues stuff, that was a bit shit, but those first two or three Doors records, they're really good. Maybe when Jim Morrison started drinking too much it all went a bit wrong then, but the early stuff's really good. 'Crystal Ship', that's such a beautiful song.

EP You've never written any lyrics for songs, have you?

PT I did in the early days. I've not got the voice for it, but I've done some vocal stuff that I'm happy with. But my voice is very kind of mid-rangey, bassy, and with the shitty equipment I was using it'd tend to get lost in the mix. I would just listen back to it and decided to stop doing that. I might do it again one day. Plus the whole business of having lyrics and having to have a subject. If you have lyrics, people tend to think the lyric's more important than the music, they think the music's an illustration of the lyrics, which is complete bullshit. So, no.

EP Do you put much thought into the titles of your records, though?

PT Some I do, some I don't. Sometimes the titles come just like that. Sometimes they take a while. A lot of the titles are stolen, borrowed from other people's work and old songs. Obscure references to things. A lot of the time it's just the sound of the words, the rhythms...*you cannot tell cigars by the picture on the box*...it's got a good rhythm to it, you know. It should have, it's from an old Music Hall song. I go for things which are kind of poetic. That's a horrible word, poetic! Something that's got some music to it. Ashtray Navigations itself is a parody. Things that generate some rhythm and have got beauty. That's much more important than what they mean. Some of them mean stuff, some of them don't.

EP I've got something written down here. I'm not sure if it's a question yet. I've always thought your music was very personal, something you very much care about. Not aiming at trying to impress people or reach an audience, but really just created for your own satisfaction.

PT Yeah. I must admit I do listen to my own stuff. Horrible confession!

EP No, I mean what's satisfying is the whole process of its creation, its realisation.

PT Oh yeah, yeah. Especially now I'm playing with other people live, you can hear it all being done at once. That's really something. And them doing things that you don't expect, because I don't really tell them very much what to play. So yeah, completely. I really couldn't tell you what my motivation is. I don't think I want to know, because it's a bit like knowing how the wheels of the universe work. I don't think you're meant to know these things really. It takes the mystery out of it, a bit. I don't really know what my motivation is. It's not really something that I think about.

EP Do you know Paul Anomali?

PT I haven't seen him for a few weeks. He's not in this part of Leeds, his up in Arnley. It's about a 40-minute walk, so I don't really see him all that much and he doesn't come to gigs very much.

EP I managed to upset Paul, by saying in print The New Blockaders were middle class art students.

PT (Laughs) I'm not surprised! He's a total working class guy. All The New Blockaders are. Me too. I'm not gonna be like fucking Robert Wyatt about it, not that Robert Wyatt is working class really. He's a Marxist, he's from a solid middle class background. We all are working class. Which is hard. It does make it hard in this country. The portals of art and culture aren't exactly cast wide open for you if you're from that kind of background. It's difficult, so I can understand why Paul got riled about that one! He's never been an art student, and I don't think Richard has either. I wasn't, when I got into Surrealism, it was just 'this looks interesting, this is more exciting than drinking ten crates of cider and getting in a fight', and that's what you're drawn to.

EP You don't want to talk about Neil Campbell, do you?

PT We can do if you like. I knew him through T Culture, and he reviewed some stuff for a magazine, and then he sent me a parcel of A Band stuff. It was a great moment, to at last discover some people who were thinking along similar lines. Something that's not particularly serious, yet not a joke at the same time. There's a certain mystery involved in it. It's about the pleasure of doing it, rather than about trying to set yourself up as some kind of guru of the avant-garde or whatever. That was a big one, meeting Neil. Have you heard The Skaters? Has Neil put you onto The Skaters?

EP Yes, he did. I did get sent this LP, this label from Norway put out a Skaters LP.

PT *Dark Rye Bread*. That's kind of different from the others, it's noisier. A lot of their best stuff hasn't been released yet. James from The Skaters sent me a parcel which looked like someone had emptied his waste paper bin into a jiffy bag and sent it to me. And there was a cassette with no writing in it and there was a CD with no writing in it. It's probably the most beautiful music I've heard in my life. I don't know when it's coming out. He's starting a tape label. He's doing an Ashtray tape, a Wolf Eyes tape, and a bunch of other stuff. He was on about putting stuff out on tape. [I said] don't, because there's so much detail in there it's gonna get dwarfed in tape hiss. All these young people are coming out all of a sudden, they've got some kind of [idea] that cassettes are cool! And me going, cassettes were the best that you could do, the best that we could afford, and they're kind of shitty really. I guess you've got to let them go with it.

EP I spoke to Neil at the Sage.

PT Him and Adam, wasn't it? Adam mentioned it on the way back.

EP Neil's not happy with the way the interview is turning out. Worried it was too informal or something. It's often something I find, that musicians are often quite non-plussed when asked to talk about their music.

PT It's a bit weird, yeah. I've got to admit, you've maybe got this impression already actually, but I have been thinking about this, being the first interview I've done, what I want to say. I've had to edit this one in my mind. It's probably all come out fucking mixed-up. Come across badly, like some idiot from Stoke-on-Trent, but there were some serious points in there somewhere.

EP Is that where you were born?

PT. Yeah. It's kind of important to the music that I do as well. It's not a sort of place where you can grow up and then proceed to take yourself seriously. It's probably the least pretentious place on the planet, Stoke-on-Trent. On the one hand it's good, because you're not allowed to take yourself seriously, and on the other hand it's bad because you're not allowed to rise above your station. So many people I know in Stoke still live there, in a house opposite their parents, stuff like that. It's a place to get stuck. It's also weird that you have this kind of affinity with people that are from there, or people from similar places. There's so little else in Stoke you have this kind of instant connection with people. It's quite frightening.

EP (launches into a short rant about how globalisation is erasing any sense of regionalism in the UK, how the only culture we have left is shopping, blah blah blah...)

PT Yeah. I'm not gonna knock that totally. I kind of appreciate the anti-Globalisation arguments, but on the other hand I am doing music, and my next CD's coming out on an American label, and after that it's coming out on a Finnish label. And we play gigs with people from Finland, and we might have a CD out in China. All kinds of things. So it's a double-edged sword, and maybe the sharp unpleasant edge is bigger, but there's quite a nice other edge to it. Living in some rural place which is only accessible with a cart horse and having to eat gruts for tea like Ivor Cutler isn't a barrel of laughs. So it is a double-edged thing, but I hear what you're saying at the same time.

EP Sometimes I come out with these things which are a bit glib. I think it's different if at least you're able, as an artist, to make a difference somehow. Yes, you have to sign up to the Capitalist system in order to do it, but at least you're able to bring into the world something that is unique.

PT But it's quite interesting how, what you want to do as an artist is mostly something that's quite anarchistic and quite socialistic, but you have to market it as a product. I mean, that's a horrible, horrible situation to be in, but at the same time some quite interesting things come out of that, some interesting contradictions. I think everything interesting in art is about contradictions, grey areas. Like CD and CDR technology and things like that, which is completely a product of Capitalism. CDs were made, not because they were some radical new format, they were made because they were light and postable and would provide a good investment, and would enable the record company to sell people their record collections over and over again. But then again, it's bitten back. Now people can file-share. They've turned around and bitten the music industry on the arse. So there's quite an interesting dialectic going on there.

EP And there are so many bands who out on this radical chic, and they just sign up to the anti-global agenda without even thinking about it. I thought I was gonna gets loads of stuff like this from Scott Foust, when I spoke to him.

PT Oh no. He's an aesthete, like me! Guy Debord never went on a fucking demonstration in his life! He was just into drinking himself senseless. Guy Debord, the guy who said 'I'm a writer, I may not have written as much as other people who write, but I'm a drinker, and I have drunk more than most people who drink.' That's Guy Debord. These people are like dandies. Oscar Wilde, as well. My favourite political writer is Oscar Wilde. There's a track on the next Ashtray CD called 'The soul of man under Socialism', because I think everybody should read the essay of the same title. The anti-side of Oscar Wilde's kind of been glossed over a lot. He became a gay icon, but there was a lot more to him than that. Like all his writing, it turns a lot of your assumptions completely on their head. It's a really brilliant piece of writing, which is a completely utopian and idealistic view of how the world should run, but it makes so much sense. So definitely check that out.

EP Would you say you're quite well-read?

PT I work in bookshops so I suppose I've got to be. People think I'm well-read but I'm not. I've not read a lot of classics, but I've read about them. I don't think I've read a novel for a very long time. At the moment I'm reading a book about Philip K Dick. I've read parts of Ulysses, mainly the Bloom soliloquy which I've actually read several times. It's just an incredible piece of writing. And I'd like to get to grips with the rest of it, but not having time. That's the answer to your question. I'm not well-read but I've read the beginnings and endings of lots of books! First page and last page! Who cares about the bit in the middle! It's a Ronald Reagan quote. Politics is like show-business...you've got to have a big opening, then you can coast for a bit, then you've got to have a dramatic finish. I'm sure most records are done pretty much identically. Except Ashtray ones, they usually have the dramatic opening, then they coast a bit, then there's a dramatic bit, then there's a quiet bit at the end. So you've got to watch out for that! □

The Shadow Ring

"When your hands are these tools, you just have to make the best"

The Shadow Ring, L-R: Graham Lambkin, Darren Harris, Tim Goss

AFTER MEETING GRAHAM LAMBKIN for the first time in New York City, I met up in London to speak with him and Darren Harris. The Shadow Ring released their final LP *I'm Some Songs* in 2005. In their brief and marginal existence, this English combo has somehow managed to establish some sort of a grass-roots support among listeners; although Graham seems to think everybody hates them, there are some people who see them as 'the real UK underground' and sometimes put them in a category with The Fall, as though they were living up to a promise The Fall had somehow missed.

The story for me started late, with the *Lighthouse* double LP. I had never heard anything like it, but I was also very confused as to what was going on with it. Why were members of Idea Fire Company involved? Were the band English or American? Soon after this I heard the *Lindus* LP which tipped me over the edge. I was intrigued enough to start looking into the back catalogue, and found it surprisingly easy to get hold of copies. One LP and two singles arrived from eBay, a CD and the first LP from Stefan Jaworzyn's rare record list, and one track on a compilation pack from the residuals of the Fisheye catalogue. I'm still looking for the Corpus Hermeticum CD.

The story that emerged for me is far from complete, but I think we have a rare case of a band who actually improved over time, and managed to get closer to what they originally wanted to say in the first place. If you collect lots of records, particularly by punk, indie and post-punk bands, then you may share the common lament of many fans: you only like their early work. Band X made a great first LP, then they broke up; or anything else Band Y made after that first LP was never as good. As some pundit has pointed out (probably Elvis 'knowall' Costello), you have your entire life to think about what to say on your first LP, then 9 months to make the second. If you have a record contract, that is.

In the 'early work' of The Shadow Ring you can hear the beginnings, the faint stirrings of ideas coming to life. Lambkin and Harris were joined by S Fritz and Robert Lily to make the first single, 'Don't Open The Window' / 'The Heavy Foot of the Lark'. Slammed down direct to 2-track in 1993, the music is simultaneously wiry and fragile – it could collapse at any minute. Everyone involved is trying out ideas, grasping at something in a slightly frantic effort to extend their imaginative reach. Something needs to be expressed, but nobody knows quite what it is, and everyone is naïve and untutored, lacking the means to bring form to ideas. You can hear this process happening live on record. This gap of understanding is exceeded by the determination of everyone to do something. *We never made a sculpture before, but put that clay in our hands, and just watch.*

From these relatively 'primitive' beginnings, a strange language evolves and develops. I think I can identify two core elements of this language.

Preparation: a process whereby the writer draws on his mysterious trance-like observations of the world and converts them, almost randomly, into a combination of prose-poetry ramblings and documentary reportage. Certain key images recur throughout the corpus, but this may not be significant; a lot of them (water, fish) may simply be because that's what the writer found around him at the time. I never went to Folkestone, but I bet there's a lot of water and a lot of fish.

Keeping it simple: lacking any ability to play musical instruments, and remaining indifferent to the possibility of learning that craft, so finding ways to make simple things work for us. Tape recorder, basic electronics. Uncomplicated devices that anybody can make to work – or cause to malfunction. *But even that malfunctioning can be understood intuitively, and made to work in our favour.*

From here, things take an even more interesting direction. When malfunctioning devices aren't always adequate, a third member steps in, one who understands something of musical structure, electronics and computers. Yet he also realises he can only bring so much of that knowledge to the project, or it won't be The Shadow Ring at all. Then the voice of the reciter: in a way, another malfunctioning device, in that said reciter is reluctant to perform at all, knows that he makes mistakes in his reading. Through process of working, this too is turned into a strength, made to work for us. This latter development seems to me one of the more astonishing features of The Shadow Ring, and one which is quite unique. It gives the work an almost unbearable honesty. And it is testament to the writer's depth of compassion that he has empowered the reciter, his

lifelong friend, in this way.

The continuation of the process is to extend it into recording, into documentation. Once again, the need for honesty requires that every mistake, every false start and technical glitch is captured, ruthlessly; some of them even end up in the finished item. And again, the potential malfunctions offered by cheap equipment and cheap tapes are made into virtues; accidents become part of the statement, often to the point that they aren't even accidents any more.

The creators deny the possibility that their skills have improved over time, only admit that they did become 'totally true to themselves'. Yet the process described above, learned through doing rather than through thinking, was so successful that by the time of *Lighthouse* (December 1997), it had become totally intuitive. They could do it 'instantly'. Their parts for said record, a double LP, were recorded within the space of less than a month. Now, how many other musicians can say that?

Even if I've only half-understood their creative processes, I would still say this proves that The Shadow Ring really are completely unique. It's extremely difficult to arrive at finding your own voice to the degree that these young men have done it. The recorded artefacts are just the end product, the tip of the iceberg, but there's a lot to decode in there. The decoded messages are not to everyone's taste of course, and no reason why what they do should appeal to anyone. You have rarely heard such bleakness captured so unflinchingly into the grooves of a vinyl artefact! But it's not the bleakness of 'industrial' music, which is for the most part pure fantasy and wallowing in sick imagery. Rather, this is the hard realities of life, the things we would rather not think about, set forth in a frighteningly direct and unmediated way. To listen is to mainline pure emotion, pure humanity, pure experience.

Besides his involvement in the records, Lambkin is also one-third of the occasional group Tart with the core members of IFCO. He is a visual artist whose strange work was once in demand for various underground record covers, though not so much any more. He recently had a book of drawings, *Unfocused Hands*, published by Tim Shortell in New York, a limited edition full-colour art book with a CD insert. It sold out instantly. A further related project of treated photographs is on its way. Lambkin has also made a few camcorder films with Shortell and Foust. He currently lives in Poughkeepsie (NY state) with his wife Adris Hoyos, who used to be in acclaimed noise band Harry Pussy. Harries still lives in Folkestone, Kent. where the band all used to live and where most of the records were made. The cold and miserable conditions of the shared house there (Coombe House) seems to have contributed greatly to their aesthetic.

Interview took place 04 June 2005 at Sound Projector HQ

GL = Graham Lambkin
DH = Darren Harris
EP = Ed Pinsent

EP I didn't prepare anything on this at all. You did speak to Nick Cain for *Opprobrium* a while back, didn't you? Have you been interviewed since then?

GL Yes, but I can't remember the name of the magazine. Someone in Australia. In about 1998. It was a small fanzine, the first and only issue. I guess we didn't really bode too well! So you might want to stop now. This could be the kiss of death.

EP Darren was saying before you've known each other since you were teenagers?

DH It was Tim that first introduced me to [Graham]. I can remember Tim talking about his good friend Graham, and me muscling my way in on an invite round to your place one teatime.

GL That's not how I remember it at all. I remember seeing you in the street. You were walking in Folkestone and I was standing outside my house.

EP Can you remember the first thing you ever did that might be counted as vaguely musical or artistic or poetry-related?

GL At school. The Hearthouse Singers. It was a cassette. To show initiative at school, you had to come up with a Works Enterprises project that you could maybe manufacture yourself. And we did a cassette tape...

GL Well, we had one ready to manufacture and no-one bought one.

EP Were you aware of the cassette scene in the 1980s?

GL Oh God no. It had no sleeve...

DH We had a five-string guitar about six inches long. And we numbered strings one to five. And there was even [composing] pieces...if you do string one, then string three then string four, and we'll call it 'Apples'. That was piece number one! We actually wrote pieces for that tape.

EP I don't understand any of that.

DH We just numbered the strings that we plucked, and you plucked them in the order of the numbers that happened to be on the paper. We were that good! We knew what these strings would sound like when they were plucked.

EP So, things obviously just grew from that point. Was that the three of you?

DH Just the two of us. Tim was washing car windows. That was his Works Enterprises project. He made more money, actually.

EP Obviously, the school was deeply impressed by this work?

DH Not at all. They interviewed you to see what you had been doing.

EP So at some stage later, you formed your own record label, which was Dry Leaf Discs.

DH That was only out of necessity. No-one else would put out a Shadow Ring record, unless they had to.

GL That's true. We just didn't want to have a cassette out, we wanted to have a record. We thought people would take it a bit more seriously. Even though with hindsight, there's no reason why anyone should have done. The early records were very amateurish.

EP You got that right!

GL It's no secret.

DH When your hands are these tools, you just have to make the best.

EP Do you subscribe to a DIY aesthetic?

GL I didn't know anything about it at the time. I just thought that's what people who made records did. We weren't trying to be lo-fi. We were trying to make a pop record! It would be very easy, wouldn't it, to say that we were keying into an underground scene. But no, we weren't.

DH If we'd have been number one next week, we'd have been pleased. We just had no money to spend.

GL Or no clue of how to play an instrument, or make a record. It's crap!

EP When did you first make any kind of connection outside of Folkestone?

GL Somebody at World Serpent was in the cutting room or wherever it was when our record was being made. And they called me at work, and they introduced themselves, and they bought twenty singles.

EP Which record was that?

GL The single, 'Don't Open The Window', the first single we did. It was about 1992. That was the first distribution we received.

EP What happened as a result?

GL Nothing at all. They never re-ordered. And then by that time, after we'd sat on a bunch of these records, we found out about Forced Exposure. We sent a copy to them, and they loved it. They took half the pressing. They wrote a nice review. When their catalogue used to be a stapled sheet of A4, they wrote very good reviews, a half-inch blurb.

EP Did Siltbreeze take an interest because of this?

GL Tom [Lax] must have picked it from them.

DH I think Jimmy [Johnson] wrote and said that Tom would be into it. And [he advised us] you should send Tom your stuff. And we did and he was into it, quite thankfully.

EP What did Siltbreeze put out?

DH They put out *Hold Onto I.D.* and *Put The Music In It's Coffin*. And then we got invited to play over in the States, which we done one year and went down dreadfully, and played even more dreadfully. So therefore we were just really pleased we got invited back again.

EP What did you do for your live set up? I can't form a picture of The Shadow Ring playing live. Did you have any instruments?

DH Yeah. It is quite nice that you ask that, did we have any instruments! (chuckling). Are we that fucking bad? Yeah, we had instruments, and we done completely different things each tour, and played different stuff. We realised the first year that if you don't rehearse, you don't stand a chance. If you do rehearse, then you stand a minimal chance. So we decided to rehearse. We was trying to push across our new album at the time. Whenever we've done something, we don't even know how to re-do it. We used to have to learn what we had done, in order to re-do it.

EP You could never repeat a song?

DH Well we did manage to, yes. But we didn't know we could at the time. We just stumbled around.

EP Does this mean that making the records was totally spontaneous?

DH I would say no, to a certain degree. The first single, we knew we wanted to make records, we didn't know what we was going to do, and I remember Graham had the sleeve, the titles of the songs, all prepared. All that was missing was the songs themselves! I remember us celebrating the release of our first single when all we had was the covers printed up. We hadn't done a thing!

GL All back from the printers, and we hadn't recorded a minute of music.

DH Then we went back [home] after a couple of drinks, and we recorded what happened to be the first single. That's how it was.

EP So, trying to reproduce this process live presented certain difficulties.

GL No, we just had to learn to rehearse. We decided which songs we could attempt and then we just stuck ourselves in the room and we rehearsed them three or four times a week for six weeks, until we remembered them. They weren't written down, and they weren't rehearsed at the time. But they weren't improvised. We fidgeted and fumbled around...

DH We weren't clever enough to improvise.

GL No, none of that. We were just fiddling around until you find something pretty. We'd take that as a starting point. 'That sounds good, so you keep doing that, and I'll do this. And then...'

EP Just to be clear, I assume you've never learned how to play the chord of C on a guitar...

DH No, no, don't know any chords...don't even know how many chords there are! We broke a guitar string. And we had to go into a shop to ask for a new guitar string. I went in there and I asked for an F string! And they laughed! I didn't know there was no such thing. I was just...it was the thickest one and I was counting from A to F, the wrong way. And I still don't know the difference.

GL A fat one! We need a new fat one!

DH If it had been one of the strings in the middle, we'd have been fucked! We never broke any more strings.

EP Is there anything you'd ever heard up to that point that gave you inspiration, or an idea to proceed the way that you did?

DH Everything we'd heard up until that point. And that's loads of different things.

GL [We realised] we're not on our own. But that's different from fitting into a scene. These were things from all different places and different times. It wasn't a clique of four groups. There is a music scene in Folkestone, a very healthy local scene, but it didn't have any room to let us in. Garage bands, heavy metal groups...

EP OK, so you put out some singles on Dry Leaf Discs, you got some interest in America, Forced Exposure, played gigs there, Siltbreeze put out two records. How do we get from there to joining up with Scott Foust?

GL Between Siltbreeze [releases], there's a Corpus Hermeticum CD. *Waxwork Echoes*. There was that first Siltbreeze one, then *Put The Music In It's Coffin*, then there was *Waxwork Echoes*, then *Hold Onto I D.* And it was on that *Hold Onto I.D.* tour, if you like, the second tour, that's when we met Scott. Because he'd been writing to us. He must have started writing to us some time around the third album, I think. We just told him we were going to be over and he hooked up. The Idea Fire Company opened for us on that tour. So that was the first time I met him and then we got on well. He offered us to do another record. At that time Siltbreeze was taking itself off in another direction, so we figured that we'd just go with Scott after that. We said we'll do a double [LP] and I've invited him to be on it, thinking that maybe it might sweeten the fact that it's a double.

EP So the first thing you ever did with him was this double LP *Lighthouse*?

GL. No, the first thing wasn't that. There was some loops, he asked us to send him some tape loops for a [project] that he was working on. We liked the idea of working with tapes together, and when he offered us the chance to record for him, we offered him the chance to record with us. He sent us tapes with no idea of what we'd do with them, and we just patched into what we had already [done].

EP And this is how *Lighthouse* came to be?

GL That was how [Scott] fitted into *Lighthouse*, yes. Scott and Karla's input was all pre-recorded.

EP They told me that too. I was a bit disappointed. I always thought the six of you would be in a room together recording it.

GL No, no. But if it creates that illusion, then that's a good thing.

EP That's why it's better for me not to know these things.

GL Well, you're gonna hate us by the end of the interview.

DH The *Lighthouse* saga – we didn't know what we was doing at all, really, did we?

GL The one thing about *Lighthouse* which was different from the other records was that that's the record where I decided that we weren't gonna try and be a band any more. A conventional band, that did songs that were repeatable live, and trying to do albums that had a beginning, a recognisable format. [Instead] I just wanted to do a sprawling record, that was one-take stuff. It was just us having a lot more fun. Not caring any more. And in a way it made it all a lot better. I think that was the one thing we were missing. Everything before that I think is a little weaker. But *Lighthouse* onwards, I think we've found our strengths. It just took us four albums to find it. There's merit in the early stuff, but it's all very patchy I think. I'm just being honest, how I feel about it. I feel that there's some shit on those early records. There's some good stuff, but...

EP You said, Darren, that with *Lighthouse* you didn't know what was happening. Was it a chaotic situation in some way?

DH Well, it was not chaotic. We never record chaotically, that just doesn't work for us. We're not good enough. We have to work out what we do, because we're not good enough to [record spontaneously]. I don't mean that [in the way of] begging more compliments. I just mean we're not skilful enough musicians.

GL We're not musicians!

DH No. Not at all! I remember at the time when we heard back what we had done, 'I am the Black Piper' was the first thing we recorded for *Lighthouse*...

GL That whole album was laid down in sequence, that's how we recorded it.

DH Yes, and when we'd done that and first played it back I remember just thinking we felt that we was onto something. And it didn't get much better than that.

EP Certainly it comes over on that record that you're not like a band at all in the conventional sense. And I think that's very interesting. Did you just arrive at this point naturally?

GL I think two things I mentioned fitted in with the project. One, I realised the strengths and stopped trying to be like a band and like every other group. I realised that our strengths lie in the errors. So we just tried to propagate our errors more on that *Lighthouse* record. You picked it up in your review, when you said that every tape wobble sounds deliberate. But it really was deliberate. It was quite remarkable that you could hear that. The pieces where there was problems, we put some extra emphasis and extra weight on that particular error. And I think it gave the pieces a bit more character. And there was a lot more economics when we were recording that record. We had a lot less, we deliberately used less.

EP And what were you doing with Scott and Karla's tapes?

GL They were overdubbed, sometimes after the fact, but more often than not they were played back live in the room. Just on the stereo. Two stereo speakers. And we were playing along with it.

EP Did it take you long to make *Lighthouse*?

GL No, not at all. It was done in a month. And that's not a month [solid]. That's a month of a couple of evenings a week.

EP Do you write all the lyrics, Graham?

GL Yes, I do. But a lot of the time, especially with the *Lighthouse* thing a lot of the things that were on those lyrics were written down [when] I'd be in conversation with Darren and Tim. And they'd be talking and if they said something I thought was kind of nice, I'd write it down and incorporate that. So although I write them, I'm also pulling stuff from them, and weaving it in. I have the final say.

EP When you're writing something, do you know if it's going to end up as a Shadow Ring piece?

GL I'm writing stuff all the time. That's something I still do today, just because it gives me pleasure. If I see a little phrase or something that a bit would be nice,

then I take another look at the stuff around it, and pull... I know it sounds corny, but I don't really think of them as lyrics or poems. I just think of them as the voice part of a certain piece. They're not strong lyrics, they're not strong poems, they're just the narrative part of the record.

EP What would be Tim Goss's contribution to the Shadow Ring?

DH Massive. He saved our arse when it came to touring, certainly. And breathed new life [into the band]. Because he came in after *City Lights* and *Put The Music in It's Coffin*. After that we'd gone to the States, we'd died a death, and Tim was a friend of ours anyway and because we were in a band, he bought a moog.

GL He got stuck in! He really introduced the electronics to us. He was the reason we stopped doing acoustic guitar rambling. He's very good. He's another non-musician, and so he can do anything. Everything and no thing.

DH He was our expert. He was the musician among us, because he could play the first minutes of 'Chariots of Fire' on the piano. That was more than any of us could do.

GL We were impressed by that!

EP So Tim introduced you to the world of electronics?

DH We'd used stuff like that [before] that was similar, but Tim made that [better]. He sighted an area that we needed improvement on.

GL He took things further.

DH Definitely. Also, none of us owned a computer before then anyway. And Tim owned a computer and all the rest of it. He seemed like Einstein!

EP What's the record after *Lighthouse*? *Lindus*, isn't it? That's quite a depressing and pessimistic record. I love it. You can feel things closing in a bit more. There's all this paranoia...

GL Do you think? I take that as a compliment. I think the end was coming.

EP What, you felt the band didn't have much a life after this?

GL Well I think *Lighthouse* exhausted us in a lot of ways, because it was such a liberating record, in regard to what I was saying earlier about realising what we could and couldn't do. [With *Lindus*], we wanted to take it back to a single album but make it tighter, with the lessons that we'd learned from *Lighthouse*. And at that point, I'd left [the UK] to move to Miami, so the record was split between things that we'd recorded in real time and then things that were put together with cassettes. I think half the reason that has a claustrophobic feel to it, and it was intentional, is because a lot of it was recorded and mixed on a boom-box with a mic for a speaker. So it had a real atrocious fidelity, which I think gives it that closed-in quality. Which is just right for that material. So it was a lot of luck. But we spent a lot more time on that record than *Lighthouse*. There's a lot more work done in the mixing, and I took a lot more care in selecting sounds, and just organising the album to feel like a whole. Some kind of statement, that I wasn't sure of at the time but looking back it makes a lot more sense.

EP Another thing I like about that record, which I value very highly, is the fact that it's almost threatening to the casual listener. It invades your personal space in a way that you don't want it to be invaded, probing areas people don't want to have probed. A lot of your work does. All in all, I think The Shadow Ring's contribution to the culture would be that it's saying these things that people don't want to talk about. And I think that's incredibly important.

GL Well, thank you Ed. I think you're right, but I don't think it's something I was aiming for at the time. But I think in terms of the lyrics, when I'm writing all this stuff out...at the time it doesn't make a great deal of sense, but when I look back it does say something of the situation I was in at the time, or the mood, even in a fractured way. I look back and either I could see something was coming on the horizon, or something bad was going on, depression, all these situations. So think that probably gets captured. I think in terms of the music, [it's] because we're working with crap electronic stuff and cheap stereos, and we don't have drum kits or anything, it's just an ashtray next to a microphone. These are the sounds that people hear every day, and they [never] associate with them. You know, unless you've sat behind a drum kit in a studio, you won't have personally made those noises. But everyone's hit their arm against an ashtray. So I think whether you realise it or not, [our music] connects with you on that level. So maybe a combination of those two. That's my honest answer. It's not something I work upon, I just think it's just something that does happen.

EP I like that idea. You're taking these familiar sounds, because they're placed in the context of listening to an LP...

DH It's unsettling.

GL Nobody wants to see their life reflected in art like that.

EP That's important. Even when people talk about film-makers like Mike Leigh, they say his work is so close to real life. But I don't think it is. There's a lot of artifice. He puts a lot of effort, and a lot of artifice, into making it look like real life!

GL I don't think it is either. He should be making his movies for twenty quid with a video camera. That comes back to the thing I said earlier about the economics of it. Working with nothing! See what you can do with nothing. That is an unavoidable consequence of that, for us.

DH I always say, see what you can with nothing, but what we always want to do was make albums rather than just make music. If you wanted to make music, you've got to rehearse, and we'd have been playing in pub bands, to people in Folkestone. Probably more people would know about us than what they do now. But we liked making albums.

GL That was the primary interest, to make records.

DH That's what we listen to. You want to make a mark. I always remember us after our first single. I remember thinking I could tell my grandchildren I've cut a bit of wax.

GL You've left something behind, rather than a live gig – [with a record] you've got something. This is what we're all about. For better or worse.

EP So although you have played live, you don't consider yourselves a live touring band?

DH I – well – cause - you know – and – we love the tours we done and we love playing live, but I have to say we only ever played live because it got us our ticket to go to America. I know that sounds pretty sad, but we wouldn't have played live in London. We wouldn't have played live in Folkestone. We played live in England once. And that was only because we were asked. We was going on the radio for KFC. We don't do it for the fun!

GL Because it really isn't a lot of fun! We got a call once from Pavement's manager asking us if we wanted to support them on this tour that they were doing in England. The guy was almost like it was a given that we were going to say yes, because who'd turn down this chance? We asked how much is it going to be. Oh, you get fifty quid. What, each show? No, you'll get fifty quid. And it was four shows, up in the Midlands and somewhere else in London.

DH And you know what train fares are like.

GL I don't want it to sound like we're dropping names. But that is a true story.

DH Who wants to be slagging off Pavement now? They need the kiss of life, not fucking nails in the coffin!

EP So you don't see yourselves fitting into any kind of rock and roll mode whatsoever, or appealing to a Pavement audience, or a Sonic Youth audience.

DH I don't think any such things exist. The people that like Pavement or like Sonic Youth...how many people do you know say Sonic Youth are their favourite band? It might be different in the States, but do many people say that?

GL No, I don't know who buys our records. I don't think many people do. I was saying to Darren, to be honest, about you [Ed] before we'd met you, saying 'if you had seen this guy...' If I'd passed you in the street, I'd never have thought you had our records. But then that set me thinking. Who *would* have our records? I just don't have a clue who buys 'em. I don't know. It's not college kids. They're not buying 'em. The only people I know who bought them are friends, or friends of friends. I don't think there's a fanbase.

EP Outside of indifference, which I'm sure we've all experienced, have you ever had any really bad reaction from an audience?

DH I can remember us driving off after the Rochester gig...'You guys stink!' Being shouted into the van.

GL Yeah! But that wasn't just us! It was Harry Pussy as well. They were the ones. No-one was interested in us.

DH We had a third of the 'You guys stink!'

GL And we've had some bad reviews.

EP What did they say?

GL Just that we're crap...that we can't play. Do they think that we don't know this? They didn't try and deconstruct us in an intellectual way, it was just 'these guys can't play their instruments, their album is terrible, it's depressing, what a waste of time this all was.' Each to their own...that's fine...

EP Now I haven't played *I'm Some Songs* yet, haven't heard it at all.

GL That record is a step on from *Lindus*. It's a step on in a way that a lot of the records are. If you take the last moments of *Lindus* and then play *I'm Some Songs*, it really seems like it's just the next chapter. Continuity, absolutely. But then it takes the ideas of *Lindus* and extends and examines them further. And ends up in a different place entirely. It's a logical extension, but it's its own record, and it's its own man. It doesn't need *Lindus* to be understood. Actually, as to the critics, the few people that have picked it up, I will say that they've been very positive reviews. Which has surprised me, because to me it's our least accessible record by far. But I've had four or five reviews I saw on the internet, and they've all been extremely positive. So I was surprised, very surprised. I don't know if that'll translate into sales. Probably not. I was expecting [them] to say 'this is just beyond a joke! We've had enough of this crap! People don't need this record!' But they like it, for some reason.

EP This is the last Shadow Ring record.

GL Yes, this is the final album. There's no way that we can make another one after this. Everything we've wanted to say or were trying to say over a stream of records really culminates in this one. And I think it's a record that, if we had to represented by one record, this would be it. For me. I don't know if Darren agrees.

DH Yeah, I would agree. Definitely.

GL Tim's not here.

DH Well, his silence speaks volumes.

EP So Graham, you're also a renowned visual artist.

GL Ha, ha! Yes.

EP You've been drawing, I assume, as long as you've been writing these incomprehensible, stupid lyrics.

GL Well, my incomprehensible, stupid drawings have been going on a lot longer than that. I'm not really prolific. That's the thing. I don't sit there every night and draw. I draw when people [ask for something]. I have my own stuff which I work on privately, and then if someone asks me to do something [I will], but I don't go hawking people for little jobs and things.

EP Tim Shortell has published one book, and he may do another. Is there anything before that?

GL In terms of published work? Only for covers for albums, and fanzines, and T-shirts and things. In the nineties, I was more popular. I guess 1994-1997 I actually had quite a lot of people want stuff, but then it just wasn't popular any more, and someone else was, and then...[I was] forgotten about.

EP You're just a burned-out case.

GL Yeah, totally.

EP What record covers have you done?

GL Oh fuck. What, all of them? I did a Dead C CD. Monotract. A Splintered single. A Sun City Girls album cover, that never actually came out. Then there was a lot of singles and what-not, all American stuff. And then some T-shirts and magazines.

EP Did anybody ever pay you?

GL Actually, yes. I used to get paid by Chris somebody-or-other from the Philadelphia Record Exchange. I did three T-shirts for them and he paid me a couple of hundred dollars per design. The Double Leopards picture disc I got paid for, I got nice for that. Stefan [Jaworzyn] paid me, for the Dead C. And that was only copied out of a book, it wasn't my design really. I just took that and redrew it, so it doesn't really count. I end up getting paid in records. That Blackjack one, I did stuff for them, I ended up getting a thousand dollars in credit from their catalogue. Which wasn't very extensive, so I got 900 Icky Boyfriends singles. I don't remember now.

EP Darren, you have no other talents at all...in fact you have no talent whatsoever, really, do you? You can't draw...

DH No, I have no pretensions in other areas. And why should I? I'm not sitting here as an artist.

EP Too right you're not! You're usually the guy who recites most of the words on Shadow Ring records. Were you chosen for having the most interesting voice for what needs doing? It's interesting because it sounds so deadpan in a way...almost like you have no emotional connection to the content.

DH Even if I did have, it wouldn't sound like I did have. It's just cause I've got that kind of voice. And that's been used [by Graham] more than what I could have [managed myself]. Graham would write stuff. I've never had much confidence in reading out loud. At school, if ever I was asked to read out loud I'd always be like rehearsing. I'd be trying to predict what parts they'd ask me to read just so I could read through it before I was actually asked to read. Just so I could actually read it rather than mispronounce it and sound like a fuckin' idiot. And yet, Graham wouldn't let me read anything until it was actually there in front of me.

GL When the tapes were rolling. To get a bit of tension going. To get that mistake on tape. Which is what the whole point of it was. I wasn't being cruel. I know this about Darren, and that's why I like him so much as a narrator, because he has no confidence. I don't get a production from him, I get a very cautious, honest, sometimes error-filled reading. Which, to me, is much more natural than some vocalist who's going all up and down the scale.

DH Which is a great [thing for me].

EP You don't want Richard Burton.

GL No, I don't want Richard Burton! I don't want any *performance* at all, other than Darren's natural reading ability, which to me is far more performative in its own way.

DH But as for me, it was kind of like my failings, being put to fucking excellent use. Who can ask for more than that? The thing you don't like doing the most is the thing you end up doing.

GL It's your envelope.

EP I don't see it as a failing, though. But this is very interesting.

DH No, but I'm speaking about me, you know? When you get laughed at, at school...not that I'm wanting to [revisit the past], it makes bugger-all difference now. Now if someone asks me to read out, like when you're in the works canteen, and someone says 'read my stars for me!' Cause you get that. Well, I never do that. I'm not gonna fucking read that out. I sound like an arse!

GL (laughing hysterically) There's a ten-inch record! That would be great, Darren reading the stars!

DH And Graham has explored my failings.

GL It's part of you.

EP I want to ask you about that computer record, as well. *Put Out C-Out*. Is that just a doodle, a sketch...based on a computer program?

GL It really wasn't. That was all a lie. It's not a program. You couldn't program it. It was an impressionistic view of program [language].

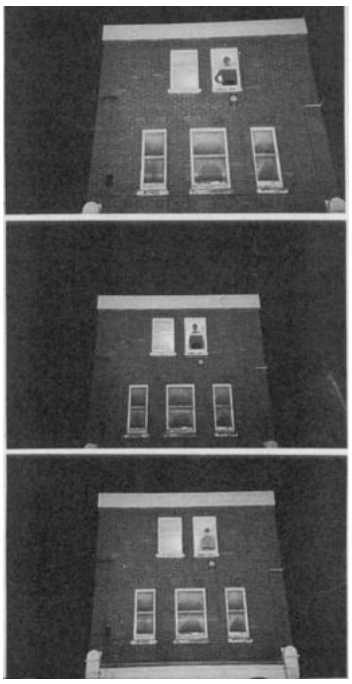
EP Who are Bloodmouse?

GL Howard. That really is a person, that's really Howard Lester, who's on *Lindus* as well. But he's my oldest friend. That's his only contribution. He has no interest in music. We got offered to do a ten-inch. It goes right back to those crappy-sounding early records that we did. In that we just did it so quickly in such abject conditions. There was no thought.

DH It's funny, because I remember that was the last thing we done before *Lighthouse*. And I think that kind of shows, when you listen to it, just from our selfish point of view.

GL On the whole I would dismiss that record as a joke. But it exists in its own [right]. It's a ten-inch, it's its own thing. A good fun afternoon is what it was. A few beers and what-not.

EP And *Hold Onto I.D.* is one of the few releases with photographs on the cover, instead of drawings. Quite disturbing photographs.



DH Ha-ha! That's where we used to live! Coombe House.

EP It looks awful. Just like the *Dub Housing* cover, Pere Ubu. These isolated figures...

DH Well we were living in Dub Housing! We weren't listening to it.

GL That's where we recorded *Lighthouse*, in that building. And the ten-inch you just talked of. And *Hold Onto I.D.* was done there as well. That was a good [place to live]. No neighbours. We were crammed in. Darren and I. Tim was not living there, but he was round there often enough that he was there in spirit. And then when Adris came to England she was living there with me in my room. Two rooms, and a kitchen, and a bathroom. Very small apartment.

DH Coldest place I've ever lived in, I have to say.

GL Yeah. Do they talk about Cold Storage? They were in paradise compared to this place!

DH We had electric storage heating. And I can remember us having our backs to this one night, and we're talking of suicide, and we've still got our backs to the heater, saying this is still too cold...

EP Storage heaters are terrible. They don't release any heat at all.

DH They're like trying to fund a cocaine habit, aren't they? They cost like 16 pound a week just to keep you alive. They store up electricity during the cheap period, then they [spill] it all out in the morning when you don't fucking need it!

EP *Were* you talking about suicide?

DH No, we weren't. I'm just saying...when you're talking about grim stuff...

GL I do remember our first night in that place. That's no lie. We had on layer after layer. We were huddled together, pressed against this thing, listening to tapes. You know, it seems very romantic looking back, but at the time...

DH It was fucking grim!

EP I think that's about it, unless there're something you feel I haven't touched on. I think there may be some things I don't want to know.

DH What don't you want to know? Ask us what you don't want to know!

GL No offence taken!

EP I know that. Let's see...does being 'underground' mean anything any more?

DH No.

GL In terms of what? Sales, credentials?

EP It seems to be too easy to be underground. There's people releasing 50 CDRs every week, getting instant credibility...

GL I think it's become a very fashionable place to be. There's obviously been an underground before we were born, but when we were at our time, the underground seemed more of a necessity, rather than a place where people would choose to be, because they like the lighting on them better. Now I think it's very cool to be in that position, but we were only there because no-one would give us proper funding, or do [anything for us]. But it was fine. What do you expect, when you can't play a note and you're terrible in every regard?

DH The underground is as much as what we could achieve, because believe you me if we could have achieved more, we would have done. The underground isn't a choice, it's just what happens. No-one chooses. But I think these days, people do choose to be underground.

GL And they make sure everybody knows it!

DH And I agree when we started, we probably knew we could appeal to the underground. That was us at our highest level, because if we could have gone better, we fucking would have done.

GL Naive. We thought anything was possible. We're gonna have a record out. So naive! People are like this.

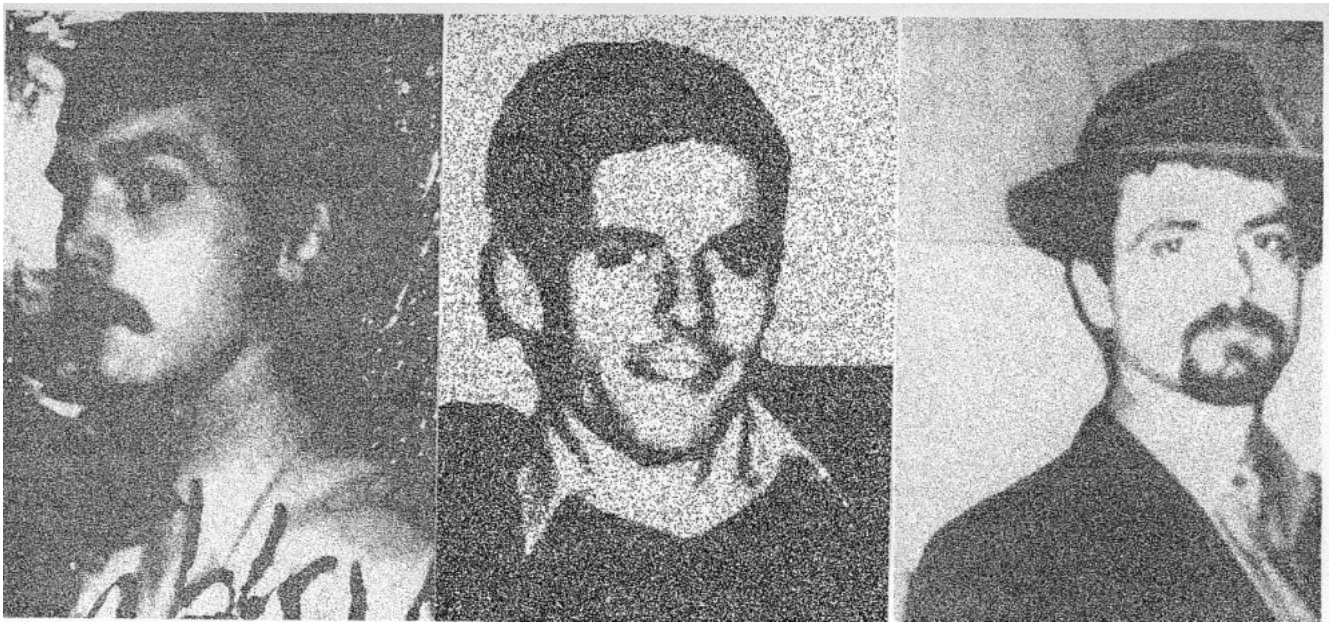
EP Can each of you say, what would be your personal motives for doing what you have done? What compels you?

DH What compels me? To make art at all? Why? That's a very...why do we do what we do. Because we can't do what we want to do. That's what I'd say. I can't do what I want to do, so therefore we do what we do. I want to do something else. I want to be a millionaire! I want to be a number one! I don't want to be where I am. And if anyone ever tells you any different I think they're talking out of their fucking arse, really. Let's face it. You go to any of these characters...they'd want to make a million, wouldn't they?

EP Let's put it another way. Do you gain any fulfilment out of having contributed to a Shadow Ring record?

DH Of course, an enormous amount, yeah. You don't think about it in those terms. You just do what you do. And I reflect on those times that we had when we done that, and that's good enough for me. It's not leaving footprints or anything like that. Which it is to start with, I have to say. But would it make any difference if we had three albums out or if we had done six albums or twenty-six? I wouldn't feel any different. Probably the larger the audience you appeal to. Which don't fucking matter. You do what you do. And at the moment, I wish I was doing something as worthwhile, but I'm not. But you still don't start out with any kind of huge game plan. Just wanting to make an album. And that was it. We wanted to make an album, and we made a few, and that's good enough for me. Wherever they land. That's the best we could do.

GL I would agree with everything that he said. I think it's true that we wanted to not become famous or rich or any of that nonsense. But we wanted to have an album, because we love music and albums. It sounds silly, but we just wanted to have one of our own. The fact that we couldn't perform professionally really wasn't even a consideration. We just wanted to get some kind of noise down on a record. And obviously we weren't fooled. We didn't want to have six thousand copies sitting around, so we opted for the minimum amount, but really once the thing was made, and we had it in our hands, that was satisfaction right there. Whether we sold any, that was great too, but...it was just, oh we have an album out now. We exist as a band. And that was great. And Darren's right. The fact that we got offered a second one was amazing. Bit it wasn't expected. It was a lot of fun. And it is, in a way, and this is another off-moment, it does end up having a life-changing effect, even on this microscopic level that we work on, because if it wasn't for that fact that we went to the States...we've made a lot of friends, met Adris, things happened, we wouldn't be sitting here with you. So it is very worthwhile. But it starts off as a tiny little



project in the bedroom, and that's the way that ends. But aside from that...

EP No, I guess I'm not really asking you that. People always seem to think that you measure success this way...you've got this many records out, I've been to this many countries, made all this money. But can you say anything about what the personal rewards are, the gains to yourself?

DH Yeah, now that is a good question. That is.

EP I do it myself. Most of the time I hate what I do. But I do look back sometimes and look at it, and say 'nobody else but Ed Pinsent could have done that drawing'. Good or bad, that's what it is. I'm the only person in the world who could have done that.

GL Right. I feel that way. I'm not proud of a lot of the early things, but I do agree with you that, when I look at them, I think they're original records. And I feel proud that we're reasonably true to our abilities and beliefs to start with, and totally true after a period of time. I think there was a turning point, and after that everything is pure Shadow Ring, uninfluenced by other people. But before that, we were trying perhaps to take an element of someone [else], and we weren't very clever. The influences show a bit, and it's a bit naff. But beyond that, I think it's very rewarding to see your work immortalised, your thoughts and the things you were doing, photographed. It's something nice to look back on. That gives me satisfaction. That those years didn't just go by in an alcoholic haze, there's something that came out of it which in 50 years' time someone else will be able to listen to, and wonder what on earth these people were up to with this odd record. I've left something. And that's the fun thing for me, listening to music. With the exception of Scott's stuff, I really don't like and I don't know the people behind the music. In the case of that record we've just heard [by The Bachs], it's nice to imagine these characters in that butcher's shop. We don't know what that [story] was all about, but they produced this fucking great record. And it has its whole sphere around it, that you can get lost in. It's not just a record in a sleeve. It sets your mind reeling. And if we can do that to one person, with one of our records, that's great. Really, I mean that.

DH I talk about playing music to my grandchildren...I've played one of our records to my mum! And she was disappointed that it wasn't Heavy Metal! She would rather I'd been there with the old feedback and the guitars. I can even remember her saying to her friends, 'to me it just sounds like a load of noise and nonsense'.

GL Your brother said something, didn't he? He heard a couple of our records, back to back. He heard 'Harlequin' and then he heard something else. But he said 'it all just sounds exactly the same'.

DH Quite perceptive, really! My brother, whose favourite group is M-People. It just amused me that my mum was describing us as Heavy Metal as a way of trying to make me sound good to her friends. We were so underground we had done *City Lights* and *Put The Music In It's Coffin* before my mum even knew we were in a band! She didn't know I had any music pretensions at all.

GL She only found out when you were leaving to go on tour.

DH I remember Graham saying, when are you going to tell your mum? I said, don't worry Graham, I'm telling her slowly! If your family don't understand, then what other chance do you stand, eh? ☐

The Shadow Ring discography

'Don't Open the Window' / 'The Heavy Foot of the Lark'
UK DRY LEAF DISCS DF001 7" (1993)
City Lights
UK DRY LEAF DISCS DF002 LP (1993)
'Tiny Creatures' / 'Harlequin: darkest part of the sky'
USA SILTBREEZE SB-35 7" (1994)
Put The Music In It's Coffin
USA SILTBREEZE SB-37 LP (1994)
'Some of Us' / 'The Wallet of Wasps'
UK DRY LEAF DISCS 7" (1995)
'Rats & Mice'
UK DRY LEAF DISCS 7" ONE-SIDED PICTURE DISC (1996)
Wax-Work Echoes
NEW ZEALAND CORPUS HERMETICUM CD (1996)
Hold Onto I.D.
USA SILTBREEZE SB-75 CD (1997)
'Mouth On Mouse' / 'Mouse In Mouth'
MYKE DRONER 7" (1997)
Live In The USA
ALPINE ARCHIVES LP (1997)
Put-Out C-Out (with Transmission & Bloodmouse)
USA HELL'S HALF HALO RECORDx 10" LP (1998)
Lighthouse
USA SWILL RADIO 017 2 x LP (1999)
Lindus
USA SWILL RADIO 021 LP (2001)
I'm Some Songs
USA SWILL RADIO 023 LP (2005)

Compilation appearances

'A Flash of 8-Watt'
Neon Signs In a Draylon Sky
UK FISHEYE CASSETTE (1993)
'All Frock Colours'
MUCKRAKER MAG / 7" (ISSUE ?) (1994)
'The Unnatural Crime of Laying An Egg'
Cock Displacement
SUPERLUX 7" (1995)
'Back-Combed Lines'
Breaking The Plastic Hymen
UK FISHEYE 4 x 7" (1996)
'Prawnography'
Waiting To Be Old
OPPROBRIUM CD (1997)
'The Way of The World (part 2)'
Four Years In 30 Seconds 10"/CD
UK DIRTER PROMOTIONS 10DPROM45 / DPROMCD 45 (1998)

JAZZFINGER

Jazzfinger's Hasan Gaylani (HG) and Ben Jones (BJ)
interviewed by John Bagnall (JB), Newcastle Upon Tyne, October 2005.

JB One of your press releases says 'Jazzfinger inhabit the magic un-named zone between improv and composition'. Is your recording method different to your performing approach and does one lean more to the planned / composed or to improvisation?

Jazzfinger photo by Stephen Lawrie

HG That quote was trying to illustrate the basic approach to the way we play and perform – a lot of people who have seen us live think we either purely improvise or have a specific drone which we then nail to the ground. Usually at home when we get together we start improvising until we find something that clicks: a mood, theme, riff, drone or zone etc. and then we'll lock onto that and improvise around that. From there it can stay quite static or it can move somewhere else completely. To us this doesn't really feel like a game-plan to make music, but more like a natural, intuitive or telepathic way of going and a manifestation of our friendship.

BJ Live v. Studio differs in as much we prepare and rehearse for a gig since people are paying to come and see us. At home we have no idea of what we want to do and so end up wherever the sound takes us. Allowing the sound to evolve / happen is the only constant, remaining ego-less and, at best, catalytic to the recording process, trying to maintain the image without focusing on it, as in a dream. As soon as you realise you are dreaming and try to act the dream is gone and you wake. We try always to dream and not to wake. Live, this is harder to do as sometimes you wake up quickly or don't dream at all, hence the need for some preparation.

HG We recently did a series of gigs across the UK, where we had prepared some loose arrangements. We then threw them away on day one – and ended up deciding what instruments to use during soundcheck and going for it on the night, which produced some of our best live performances ever. All recordings, either at gigs or at home, are recorded live onto the same ancient ghetto-blaster we have been using since 1996, with no overdubs or treatments. What you hear is how it was played at the time and any apparent tricky stuff is a result of faulty cassettes or the machine failing or freaking out, as it can be a temperamental little bastard. I threw it across the room once.

JB Would I be misinterpreting your live work as having a sublime or transcendent aim? Even the addition of a light show seems to put Jazzfinger firmly outside of the cool and conceptual school of sound-making.

BJ I see our live work like a film soundtrack with each member of the audience providing their own visuals. Our aim is infinite beauty and when we achieve this we try to hold onto it for as long as possible. As soon as it goes and we cannot bring it back we stop. When I was younger I would listen to music or read or see a painting and be transported somewhere else new and outside of myself. The fact that someone could think, draw or say these things was on the one hand so incredible and, on the other hand, so unattainable to me. I couldn't draw or paint like that, or sing like that and when I tried to everything I drew, wrote or sang didn't live. I couldn't stand behind it or feel comfortable showing it to others. The only way I can now do this is by having no direct ego involvement with the sound and, as I said earlier, being catalytic to the process. Then and only then does it work. Slowly I've become better at extending these moments into minutes….

HG For me, all of our music works when it makes a moment feel like infinity, or if it makes you drunk with unbearable intense beauty. If it sounds like we're trying to be clever or that we're merely trying to make interesting music then we've failed.

JB Tell me something about the instruments you use. Many of them look home-made or at least customised…

HG We use guitars, basses, a Hammond organ which Ben found in a skip in Southampton, toy organs, cymbals, Barbie Walkie Talkies, dictaphones, harmonica, piano, whistles, flutes and almost anything we can find which makes a noise.

BJ We also use recordings of spaces / places or things which we recontextualise via the dictaphones or walkie talkies in the same way that (Edvard) Munch would leave some of his paintings in the loft for the pigeons to shit on. We submit what we do the nature of our machines and their ears and mouths. Nothing we have is customised, we keep it simple and with no boxes or effects. We tend to lose our sound that way and become lost and unable to feel what we are doing.

JB You came together as Jazzfinger in 1996. What were your previous musical activities?

HG Jazzfinger is the first, er,'real' band I got involved in. I hadn't done anything seriously in music until then – there was a punk band at school (Bell End) but we didn't get past making badges and in the early '90s I whacked a drumkit at a gig in Wallsend, the debut show by a group called Moose Emu, who then morphed into Puppy Fat. Jazzfinger started because of Ben insisting we could do something together, even though I had no real experience. It worked from day one!

BJ Before Jazzfinger I had a bedroom band called The Cape Cleaning Fluid Company, a band built around a story and providing the soundtrack to parts of it. There's a more complete account of it in a *Bananafish* interview we did a while back but it's all about seagulls and their desire to free themselves from the flock mentality. Apart from that I drummed in a band once to impress a girl, it didn't work and the guitar player ran off with her. That was the end of that, though the singer went on to do TV comedy….

JB So have you built a backlog of recordings since you got together?

HG We've recorded nearly every week since the summer of 1996, and we are sitting on a mountain of gold, hundreds of cassettes….

JB What does your third 'floating member' Ben Wilkinson contribute?

HG Ben Wilkinson is very in tune with our mindset when it comes to music. He's quite an accomplished musician by our standards, but he has the same basic approach with regard to recording and playing live.

BJ Ben was a member of Newcastle's most underrated and underappreciated forward-looking sky-tearing rock band, Jumbo. He floats because of family commitments but is nonetheless a full member because of the weight of his contributions, as with Sarah Sullivan, whose time travelling trance inducing shortwave recordings underpin recorded tracks like 'Promise Of Sleep', 'Little Altars Everywhere' and 'Cornish Salt'.

HG The unique thing I feel Ben Wilkinson has contributed to Jazzfinger is in relation to some of our live appearances, namely the introduction of costumes, masks and a more confrontational

approach. Not to mention the few hundred live crickets he unleashed onto us and the audience during a performance at the Tap & Spile in Newcastle. We spent the performance dressed in hooded duffle coats, with masks, playing a game of snap with some Aleister Crowley tarot cards. Ben Wilkinson had some sort of gas mask contraption on his head with a tube attached to a beer bottle so he could keep drinking. We have this on video and it looks quite effective, it especially did on the night with all those insects crawling all over us.

JB What's your connection with Matthew Bower?

HG We met Matthew via Philip Best of Whitehouse/ Ramleh, who I got to know when he was studying in Newcastle during the early '90s. I've been promoting gigs in Newcastle under various guises for a long time now and back then I organised an amazing mind-blowing Skullflower & Ramleh show, and later on Ben and I would put on gigs by Matthew's other project of the time, Total.

BJ Matthew was a constant source of encouragement, even pushing us to perform for the first time supporting Total and Culver at the Cumberland Arms, Newcastle. As Sunroof formed Matthew Bower would travel over from Cumbria and spend weekends at my house where we would record and hang out. We all shared a love for the Underground Resistance label, Red Planet, Kompakt etc. as he and I were embracing the whole illegal party / ecstasy in a forest club-thing that was burning at that time.

HG That gig with Total at the Cumberland Arms in Autumn of 1996 was a proper nightmare for me with my lack of experience. I walked offstage halfway through the performance, couldn't cope. It was around this time that Matthew would come to stay in Newcastle and we would record together, sometimes with other people like Lee Stokoe of Culver/Marzuraan or Neil Campbell. These recordings would appear in altered and unaltered form on Matthew's early Sunroof releases and also the earliest releases as The Hototogisu. At that time we felt totally out of our depth, after all, we consider Matthew as someone with an amazing trail of outstanding work, we couldn't quite get to grips with the fact that he was interested in playing with us – we're just fans!

JB Is Classic English Womb your own label and, if so, is it just reserved for Jazzfinger recordings?

BJ Yup, CEW is our own label and is pretty much gonna be reserved for releases by us at the moment. It has to be that way really especially since I recently blew all of the label's cash on Wolf Eyes records and other goodies from Volcanic Tongue.

HG We do have other labels releasing our stuff as well – Mallard Lake, Beta-Lactam Ring, Rebis, Curor, Alcoholic Narcolepsy, Gold Soundz, Seed, among others, we're finding ourselves in a lucky position where we can say yes to anything we're offered and a lot of people are making offers to release things. With Classic English Womb, we collaborate with the artist Kevin E Anderson who is also a really important close friend and is providing all the images for these releases. The next release is called *The Glass Key* – as well as providing all the artwork Kevin provided the album and track titles, sort of based on a murder / mystery theme and we recorded tracks specifically for the release with these ideas and titles in mind. Kevin is also providing 80 mind-blowing collage images for a very special future release on Beta-Lactam Ring.

JB What's the Jazzfinger Sound System?

HG It's the name for our DJing adventures. We seem to have become the in-house DJs for Newcastle promoters No-Fi – this month we've found ourselves playing records at shows by Four Tet, Faust and Khanate. Anything goes, and usually does.

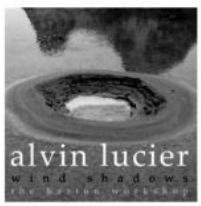
BJ Jazzfinger Sound System began as a one off 4 hour gig at the pub where I used to work. We combined playing live with DJing so we'd get a beautiful drone going, whack on some Neu! 75 with some Christophe de Babylon mixed in and just play along.

HG Rather than beatmix like everybody else, we would bleed in speech and sounds from other worlds, so we would expose ravers to snatches of Sun City Girls and comedians like Neil Hamburger.

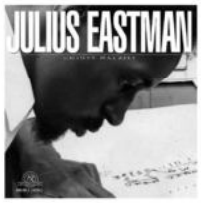
BJ We like the name because it makes us sound all King Tubby beach-driven and not like a couple of pale Northern record fruits. ■

Terry Riley
Assassin Reverie
ARTE Quartett; Terry Riley, vocals, piano and harpsichord
Features two new works for saxophone quartet and a new version of *Tread on the Trail.*
80558-2

Gordon Mumma
Electronic Music of Theatre and Public Activity
Includes the CD premiere of the classic, *Megaton for Wm. Burroughs,* as well as new versions of *Conspiracy 8* and *Cybersonic Cantilevers.*
80632-2



Alvin Lucier
Wind Shadows
The Barton Workshop
This composer portrait comprises nine chamber and electroacoustic works, four of which were composed for the group.
80628-2 (2CDs)



Julius Eastman
Unjust Malaise
This definitive document includes the signature works—*Stay on It, Gay Guerrilla, Crazy Nigger, Evil Nigger*—of Eastman, a brilliantly gifted composer whose slim but rich musical legacy can be heard for the first time on disc.
80638-2 (3CDs)

Guillermo Gregorio
Coplanar
Madi Ensemble: Guillermo Gregorio, clarinet, alto saxophone, conductor; Kyle Bruckmann, oboe, accordion; Jen Clare Paulson, viola; Fred Lonberg-Holm, cello; Michael Cameron, contrabass; John Corbett, guitar; Jim Baker, piano, ARP synthesizer
Guests: Marc Unternährer, tuba; Steffen Schleiermacher, piano; Warren Po, cracklebox; Jennifer Walshe, voice; Aram Shelton, E-flat clarinet; Ken Vandermark, bass clarinet
Eight intricate works brilliantly executed by the cream of Chicago's new music scene with special guests.
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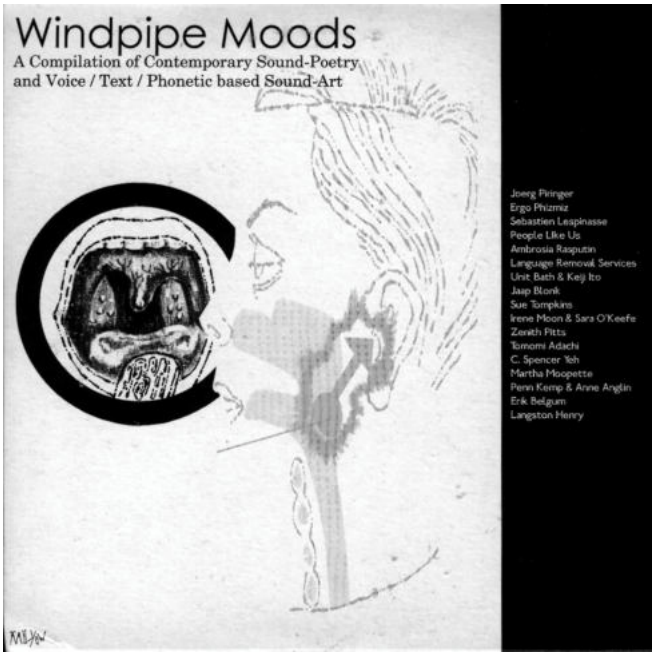
The SOUND POETRY page



Various Artists

Windpipe Moods: A Compilation of Contemporary Sound-Poetry and Voice / Text / Phonetic based Sound Art

UK MUKOW KOW013 CD (2004)

An exceptionally fine survey of contemporary sound poetry. Without wishing to succumb to terrible puns so early in a review, I'd be safe in saying *Windpipe Moods* leaves me breathless…rarely do you get such a varied, intense and exciting collection of experimental work, most of it very fringe and marginal, yet all of it leaving strong and lasting impressions. Curated by the very wonderful Ergo Phizmiz, a fine fellow who has exhibited his radiophonic work on Resonance 104.4 FM in London. On the strength of this he clearly has a lot of very gifted and eccentric people in his address book, and he also doesn't lack for a sense of humour. Now I'm very far from an expert in the world of sound poetry. I do know the *Revue OU* box set is essential listening for any who wish to know something of its history, or for those who just to hear amazing recorded sounds. Phizmiz however has set out to make some form of contemporary statement about the medium in his survey, and exhibits a very broadminded view of what constitutes sound poetry. He represents phonetic and performance-based sound poetry; collage pieces, formed out of digital editing (some of it very extreme digital editing); tape work; spoken word; and found sounds. What's more it's a very international sampling of artistes too. Second terrible pun: it may be called *Windpipe*, but Phizmiz is no blowhard!

'Every track offers a completely different perspective on what sound poetry is and what it can be,' Phizmiz informs us in the notes. Well, just about every compiler and his brother makes a claim like that, but this is one of those rare instances where it happens to be true! You'll get from the start to the finish of the disc and, even if you don't like everything, you'll be amazed by the sheer variety; not only in the finished results, which are always strong, but in the very different freaky approaches which are clearly being used by these sound-poet weirdoes. Let us travel from one extreme to the next…of particular note are the pieces by Language Removal Services, which might be tapes of various literary figures reading their work, extensively re-edited and reprocessed to make bizarre, ghostly utterances. Ambrosia Rasputin, another colourful character from the Resonance stable, spins a yarn in a broad Scots dialect packed with obscure (invented?) slang; his track is simply priceless.

Sebastian Lespinasse is from the more performative end of the scale, likewise Unit-Bath with Keiji Ito; the latter was the music composer for Maya Deren's underground films. Jaap Blonk has been heard I think in more conventional musical improvisation situations; he's an acquired taste, and is fairly boring here. Sue Tompkins is pretty much a conventional poet, but her work obviously makes most sense when it is read aloud, especially by her. The words just leap out and touch you with long bony fingers; she's full of repetitions, halting delivery, false starts, adding great urgency to her strange garden-themed stories. Phew. Then there's the exceptionally weird (and hilarious) toothbrush recording by Zenith Pitts, which frankly has to be heard to be believed. I'm getting an peculiar sensation just remembering it now…

Saving some of its strongest and strangest selections until the very end of the CD, the compilation eventually passes on a feeling of distanced unreality, of dreams coming true before your very eyes. Arriving in a very unassuming package (card wallet, understated sleeve design, very little contextual information), this comp is so vital and alive that it's practically raw and bleeding. Impossible to package it, put a spin on it; it doesn't seem to represent a single 'scene' that dumb *Sunday Times* journalists could figure out; sometimes it's impossible to understand. Potentially, this could make you see things anew, renew your own world.

ED PINSENT 18/09/2005
www.ergophizmiz.com/windpipemoods

L'Ovni Tendre

4 Pistes

FRANCE EDITION BOURBAKI- bkov01 CD (2004)

A tasty curio - sound poetry combined with nutty electronica. Interesting experiment – the idea behind it seems to have been to 'conceive networks of equivalences between sound and voice'. Well, they got that right…or did they? Zol is the musician making the sounds, Léos Ator the poet yapping out his bizarre recits in French. Plus Alfredo Costa Monteiro, rising star of minimal electronica, came in to do a mix. This brief (30 minutes) record delivers a strong disjuncture – the voice is calm and measured, the electronic bruits are random, shrill and harsh. So, perhaps rather than a 'network of equivalence' you get a network of dissonance, mismatches and unlistenability. Quite unusual. If the *Revue OU* box couldn't satisfy you, it might serve you well to glom one of these. The Bourbaki label has been doing sound poetry releases for the last five years, constantly 'exploring the junction between sound and text'. I'm still unclear as to L'Ovni Tendre – whether this is an alias of the poet or the name of another label, or what...

ED PINSENT 13/07/2005
www.bourbaki-rec.com
www.lovnitendre.com

In the ART GALLERY ➡

MODERN COMPOSITION and SOUND ART

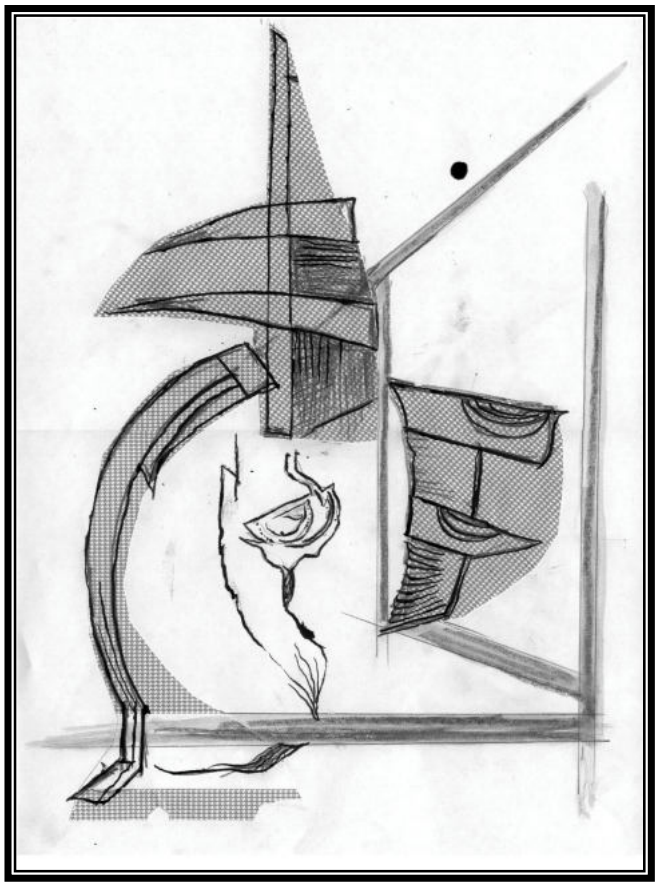
Alvin Curran
Maritime Rites
USA NEW WORLD RECORDS 80625-2 2 x CD (2004)

As title suggests, this is avant-garde composition and improv with a sea-faring flavour. Recalling his two years before the mast, Alvin Curran realised ten of these radiophonic compositions in around 1984 or 1985. They're mostly built out combinations of foghorn recordings with solo improvised music. But since the entire Eastern US seaboard is also the star of the show, e have extra documentary sounds brought in from lighthouses - bells, gongs, whistles; and that of local marine life, seabirds and animals. And sometimes vox-pop recordings of lighthouse keepers and local mariners.

This is all very nice, but we soon find that Curran doesn't really have very much to say about the sea, and at two long CDs this set quickly exhausts the subject. The ten works are really just variations on the same idea; once you've heard an improviser blowing his or her notes against the sound of a foghorn (admittedly very lovely), it doesn't take long before you've figured out where each piece is going to end up. There isn't much variety; the sea seems to be in pretty much the same mood throughout each episode (ie placid); a portrait of a stormy ocean might have made for an interesting change. Curran's other limitation is he's extremely literal with his use of the maritime sounds, and rarely gets beyond this simple level of narrative to tell us anything else.

But then, there are great exceptions. The piece featuring an improvisation from George Lewis is magnificent; it combines his trombone work with an exceptionally loud and large foghorn, the sound of lapping waves, and seabirds; and spoken-word information, edited from the speech of a lighthouse keeper, laid out in a mysterious pattern. It includes a simple five-word poem, in this case spoken by Anthony Braxton. It's an excellent sound poem and radiophonic composition all in one, combines many elements (as all these works do) in a minimal suspended structure, and passes on something of the mysteries of the sea. We need to single out the John Cage piece also, where the master's five monosyllabic words are composed into another form of sound poem, this time quite different, against a sound-field of distant foghorns in the background. Cage is best when he keeps it simple; this is sheer poetry and music, and is a gorgeous piece.

Also performing: Leo Smith, with his trumpet and foghorns and passing ships. Pauline Oliveros, with her accordion in a collage with seagulls, bells and the ocean. She sounds like an ancient whaler poised on the harbour with her squeezebox. Alongside her, we hear the voice of America's only female lighthouse keeper. She's a woman who speaks of trusting to your own senses, rather than relying entirely on scientific instruments, to read the face of the sea. Steve Lacy, performing a call-and-response sax



solo with a foghorn and generating much consonance and dissonance to engage the ear. Clark Coolidge, narrating a rather nauseating poem. Jon Gibson, with rowboat oars, playing an echoplexed horn piece not far apart from the work of Terry Riley. Malcolm Goldstein, fiddling away over two babbling New Englanders reminiscing about history. All of these compositions are excellent, but as I say they are ultimately minor variations on the same theme. Then again, instead of hearing them all in one sitting, if you'd heard them broadcast daily on the radio (the original announcements are on the disc, for those who'd care to repeat that experience), you'd be so delighted that next week you'd be signing up to serve 20 years on the brine.

Curran himself turns in the outstanding title track at a full 23:35 minutes. It's an extremely complex and layered composition, with all of the above allusions and more packed into its restless, churning fabric. Lots of foghorn and bell overdubs, multiply to make an 'impossible' ocean of enormous size; word poems, becoming massed voices delivering chants, and eerie droning. Of all the music here, his is the most transcendent piece. It ends with a sea shanty.

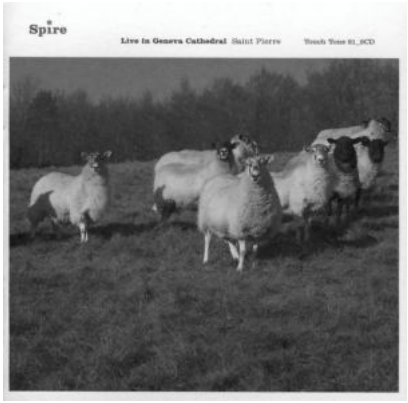
At least two subtext 'messages' emerge from *Maritime Rites*. One of them is purely intuitive, and concerns our very human response to the sound of foghorns. Is there a more haunting sound? At age six or seven, I would lie awake in the bed of a summer home in Ringstead Bay, hearing the distant two-note blast of the horn on the Shambles lightship (now retired); even the memory of it stirs something deep. Ray Bradbury managed to put this feeling into a lyrical short story ('The Fog Horn'), concerning a sea-monster who mistook a lighthouse foghorn for a mating call. The second is to do with oral history, and that component of this project which most resembles the *Radio Ballads* composed by

Ewan MacColl, Charles Parker and Peggy Seeger for Topic Records. Curran's common theme to the vox-pop recordings is that they mourn the gradual loss of a maritime history that is vanishing before our eyes; lighthouses and their paraphernalia are turning into museums. It's a legacy owned by people who seemed to be wiser than our generation, with a deeper understanding of nature and how to engage with it.

ED PINSENT 04/09/2005
www.newworldrecords.org

Marcus Davidson, Charles Matthews, Philip Jeck, Fennesz

Spire Live in Geneva Cathedral Saint Pierre
UK TOUCH TONE 21_2 2 x CD (2005)



A follow-up set, and indeed something of an 'update' on the preceding *Spire* double-CD set. You have to hand it to this label sometimes – not many people these days would have the gumption to release two lengthy collections devoted to organ music. And for the most part, it's been church organ music too. Personally I like the sound of the church organ, but I can imagine it's not exactly popular with many listeners outside of a certain coterie. What's more, label owner Mike Harding also manages to use the package to convey many subtle subtexts and concepts, along with the music.

The present recording documents a live recording of a single concert event, organised not as a 'live version' of *Spire I*, but rather a conceptual continuation of it. To assist with that continuity, some of the same musicians and composers appear: Marcus Davidson, the UK organist and composer; BJNilsen, a Touch regular; and Philip Jeck, ditto. *Spire I* was quite an ambitious, sweeping affair (not dissimilar to the double CD of Elgaland-Vargaland music), both in its musical range and the complex knot of unusual ideas embodied within the music and texts. As I recall, one of the aims was to present a radical critique of certain establishment targets, starting with the very church in which the organ is housed. *Spire II* is far less bitty than that, and it concentrates on making one single point across the length of its two discs. It seems more wedded to the architecture of the cathedral in which it was recorded; the musicians took up different vantage points in the edifice (sometimes in adjoining chapels) throughout the programmed performances. The conceptual trajectory of the musical offerings is a simple one – build it up, knock it down and rebuild it again. It's intended as a thorough deconstruction of the organ as an instrument, and organ music in general. *Spire* will take it all to pieces and rebuild it in a new order.

The concert took place in Geneva Cathedral on 5th September 2004. The first phase of the programme delivers five very fine pieces of contemporary organ music, showcasing four modern composers. The two works by Marcus Davidson are pretty fantastic – a rousing, stirring anthem first of all, followed by 'Psalm For Organ 3' which has gorgeous mixed chords worthy of Messiaen, and even has a spiritual dimension of sorts. Religion and the established church was something which the first *Spire* comp went out of its way to attack with some vehemence. This record doesn't do that, and even Jon Wozencroft has put images of sheep on the cover (sheep may safely graze, the blood of the lamb), though knowing his aversion to symbolism, this may be irony on his part. No less awe-inspiring is the 'Hymne à l'Universe' composed by André Jolivet. Largely a dissonant work, it goes through many inspired changes, as befits this complicated portrait of human evolution and the exploration of the cosmos. Jolivet's work here also delivers that spectral eerieness which can only be summoned up by the church organ sounding in full voice.

'Consonances III' was composed by Liana Alexandra, and its minimalist soothing qualities are a balm; this in stark contrast to the next piece by Henryk Gorécki, the so-called 'holy minimalist' composer who I gather had a few surprise 'hits' in the rarefied Classical CD market. His is the most 'full-on' of all the organ works here, the huge cathedral sound blaring out with some of the most uncanny chord combinations you could wish for. Excellent. This piece prompts the writer of the enclosed texts, Thierry Charollais, to start waxing lyrical about the organ's role as 'The King of Instruments'; his tone is largely positive, allowing the king to roar like the king of beasts. This is quite some way from *Spire I*, whose underlying message was anti-establishment and anti-authoritarian; if the organ was the King, then the King must die. But clearly things have moved on.

In any case we're entering the second phase of the programme, where BJNilsen and Jeck present two modernist pieces which are not played on the organ (not exclusively at any rate), but rather purport to deconstruct organ music. Nilsen's foray into this dangerous field is called 'La Petite Chapelle', because that's where he did it, retreating to a side chapel of the vast cathedral in order to launch his missiles of post-modernism from behind the barricade of the pews. Combining live playing of an organ with electronics, and some sampled organ sounds, Nilsen plays a duet with himself. Over a long stretch of time, he subtly modifies the sound of the organ with his treatments; it begins with a vaguely uncertain air, arising from the dissonant chords emerging from the pipes. Though disguising itself as a fairly ordinary drone-work, after some eight minutes this starts to get pretty intense. It transforms into a distorted and vicious groaning-rumbling effect, not far away from this composer's 'storm cloud' weather experiments, and yet still remaining true to the spirit of the instrument. This noise resolves into a fine lightly droning hoover noise, then seamlessly turns back into the organ drone. A changing wrought with such authority, it's almost like an alchemist's trick; not bad at all.

Philip Jeck retreats below ground to the crypt to perform and record 'The Crypt'. He does it using his familiar turntables, though he starts the work off with organ recordings. It's extremely strong; loops and layers, a solid rhythm, a piece which achieves the magic of floating like a soap bubble and exploding like a hand grenade, often at the same time. The organ records continue on, and withstand a battering from rock power chords which blast in from other records. The density and solidity of Jeck's construction here seems more inspired by the architecture of Geneva cathedral than by organ music, but the point is made. Acquiring an incredible intensity even by his high standards, Jeck's 'The Crypt' finally turns into something resembling progressive rock, with tasteful chords distorted and skewed by his turntable mayhem. Amazing.

Christian Fennesz is charged with the third and final phase of the project, the 'reconstruction' phase. If you've heard all the above music while poring over the abstruse texts of Mister Charollais, then it might seem that Fennesz is attempting to provide musical answers to all the burning questions raised by this Swiss intellectual. He sampled organ sounds into his laptop, then apparently switched into autopilot thereafter. It's his usual nice droning sound, pleasant arrangements of stacked chords; there's a percussion element in here somewhere. In places, and the work aims for a soaring effect but doesn't quite achieve the heights reached by swallows nesting in the cathedral undercroft. The promised reconstruction turns out to be quite some way from the brave new world we'd hoped for, and this rather weedy anti-climax to the set tends to undermine the aspirations of its creators, or at least Charollais' view that *Spire* is some form of monumental statement of subversion. However, this shouldn't detract from the set's highlights.

ED PINSENT 24/07/2005
www.touchmusic.org.uk

Malcolm Goldstein

Hardscrabble Songs
FRANCE IN SITU IS238 CD (2004)

Malcolm Goldstein has been involved with various forms of 'new' music in New York since the early 1960s. A case of being in exactly the right place at the right time, this led him to work with the likes of John Cage (even receiving a mention in Cage's seminal book *Silence*) and Merce Cunningham. He

is no stranger though to European shores, his music having been performed at such stuffily named German occasions as the Prix Ars Acustica and Pro Musica Nova. As both a composer and violinist he has a CV that is extensive to say the least. The pieces on this album were recorded between 2000 and 2002.

Three of the five pieces on this CD see Goldstein playing solo violin. The other two are comprised of Goldstein playing more violin, but this time accompanying himself with his own voice on the album's title track, and the final piece, a string quartet performed by the Quatuor Bozzini. It soon becomes clear that Goldstein prefers a balance somewhere between composition and improvisation, only the second piece, 'Soundings', being completely devoid of pre-set material. His playing is rapid, choppy, and no doubt very grounded in compositional theory. As such it is both a shining example of the New York 'School' and is the sort of thing that you will probably either feel a deep affinity for, or have no great feeling for whatsoever.

The last two tracks on the album are probably the most interesting. The penultimate sees Goldstein playing solo, but tempering his normal rate of output with the deliberate use of silence and a textural approach, although the note that this music should be accompanied by a talk referencing Joseph McCarthy and anti-terrorist hysteria seems a little, well, New York. The final piece is a string quartet that consists of the four performers playing 'perspectives' of a song, which itself is never heard. All up it's an album of very educated performances, by definition containing nothing in the way of rough edges. If you only buy one album of contemporary classical…

AARON ROBERTSON
6 rue de la justice, 75020 Paris, France
didier.petit.insitu@free.fr

Zeitkratzer
electroniX
GERMANY x-tract x-t 2006 CD (2005)

With this exceptional record Zeitkratzer confirm their profile as one of the most unusual, dynamic and cutting-edge performance ensembles in Europe. We last heard them performing compositions by the nihilist/absurdist angry-American performance artist John Duncan, on the estimable CD Fresh in 2002. I think they came out of the German Podewil Festival; certainly they recorded this in Berlin, during 1999-2001. The theme of this project is about using acoustic instruments to emulate the textures and sounds of electronic music; and playing compositions by artistes usually associated with the electronic realms. It works exceedingly well here. Right from the start of their work, this ensemble had been collaborating with these modern composers who fell outside the strict definition of academic music. At the same time, they preferred the sounds of traditional acoustic instruments, which in terms of dynamics and complexity of sound, continue to beat a laptop full of soundfiles hands down.

Five pieces in all, of which four are compositions and one a group improvisation (some of the players come from an improv background), and realised with conventional chamber-ensemble instruments – piano, violin, cello, trumpets, tuba, saxophone, accordion and percussion. The extremely tight-knit playing results in a highly pleasing drone-noise, replete with many-layered chord clusters and intricate microtones. It's a testament to the playing skills of every man-jack of this combo. How can so much music result from so few people? Gyorgy Ligeti required an entire orchestra to get the same effects.

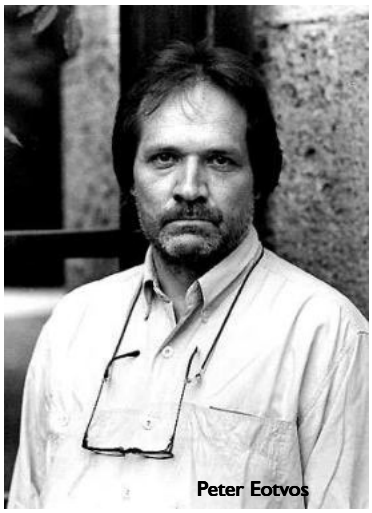
'Insects' is a Bernhard Günter composition, a low and long rumbling creaking affair filled with tension and vague menace. Bernhard gave the ensemble a precise description of what he wanted; he also gave them a 'guide track' in the shape of a performance CD, and Zeitkratzer used the sounds to help them along, imitating them to a certain extent. Extremely compelling. 'Supersuperbonus' is by Terre Thaemlitz, another electronica artiste brought out of the NYC underground DJ scene and taken one step closer into the arms of the conservatoire, by this bold and unusual performance. A subtle, groany and shimmering work results. With the occasional radio sample brought into the realm of near-audibility, this is almost like a Keith Rowe tabletop guitar solo, rescored for chamber ensemble. The multiple layers are so carefully arranged that they seem to be floating in the air like delicate mirages.

'Was Noch Was' is credited to Manfred Klauss and Onned Bock, though its ancestry is complex and it may derive from two other previous compositions by Schothaeur and Gillis. This is one of the strongest pieces on the CD, with a sound so closely-woven – virtually an embroidery of high-range sounds stitched with microscopic needles – that it's hard to believe it's not being played by machines. The fabric of the droning is sometimes rent asunder by gloomy foghorn blasts. What an atmosphere. 'Dead Air Part 8' was composed by Column One, and was performed in an installation-type setting, under video monitors. A complex knot of acoustic feedback results. Finally with the help of conduction from Dror Feiler the combo play an eight-minute improvised piece to close the CD.

All the players deserve a round of applause; among familiar names, we have Axel Dörner, Franz Hautzinger and Alexander Frangenheim, all familiar from various improvisation combos and projects. Reinhold Friedl is the pianist and artistic director. This is a fascinating experiment and a great pleasure to listen to. Play the full 63 minutes and you're guaranteed to wind up in a trance of mesmerised bliss, watching the gently-shifting, slowly rising and falling musical micro-patterns.

ED PINSENT 14/07/2005
x-tract@web.de
www.bkv.org
www.zeitkratzer.de

Various Artists
Hungarian Electronic Music: Zoltan Pongracz, Peter Eotvos, Ivan Patachich, Mate Victor, Peter Winkler
CREEL PONE NO NUMBER CD (ND)


Peter Eotvos

Originally issued on vinyl in Hungary in 1979; a bootleg it may be, yes, but nevertheless this is an interesting snapshot of experimental electronic music of Hungary from 1968 to 1976. The kind of electronic music featured is what we would call formal electroacoustic composition similar to the kinds of experiments done in Western Europe and the United States during the same period and earlier; much of the music on this recording was generated with the application of mathematical formulae and principles to the equipment, which included a Hammond organ forced to sound rather un-Hammond-like, available at the time. Overall, this is a very lively set of six pieces, the liveliest of which must surely be the remarkable voices-only drama 'Mese' ('The Tale') by Peter Eotvos: various narrations of a fairy story about a dragon fight are told in snippets layered over one another, although a young woman's voice tends to dominate; the effect can be very amusing yet a bit scary all the same.

Three of the five composers included here studied at the Ferenc Liszt Academy in Budapest and the most senior person here, Zoltan Pongracz, a former student of Zoltan Kodaly, taught electronic composition there. In spite of the intense training the artists must have had, all the works featured convey a spirit of adventure and exploration and there is wonder at the discovery of strange, unearthly and often very quirky sounds in hidden territory. Generally, I find the earlier tracks, in particular Pongracz's contributions which include the unfortunate Hammond organ, are more dynamic than later tracks with the last track, 'Viscositas' ('Viscosity') by Victor and Winkler a very

ordinary parade of sci-fi bleeps and bloops in comparison with the rest.

If your taste runs to Iannis Xenakis, Tod Dockstader, Karlheinz Stockhausen (with whom Peter Eotvos once worked), some of the French musique concrète composers like Pierre Henry and northern European electronicists like Rune Lindblad and Erkki Kurenniemi, surely your music collection has a space for this CD. Considering the difficult political and social conditions that prevailed in Hungary during the period when this music was made (true, Hungary was the most 'liberal' of the eastern European Communist states but the country was still firmly subject to the Soviet Union, plus when you look at the situation in Romania where imports of musical instruments and technology were actually banned until after the downfall of the Ceaucescus, you realise 'liberal' here is a very relative term), this music may be as daring as the artists could afford. According to the CD sleeve notes, a couple of musicians featured on the CD went abroad to further their careers and I wonder if their overseas jaunts were not actually some form of exile.

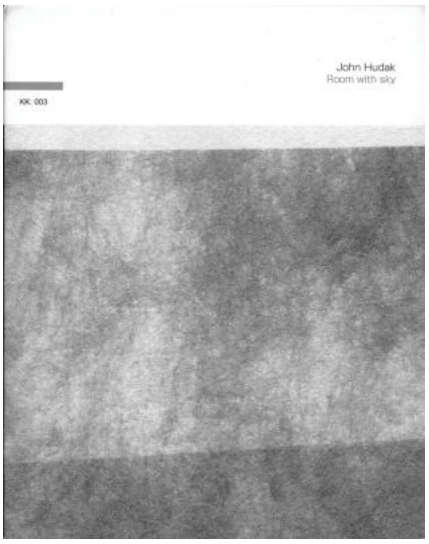
The packaging is pretty basic with the CD sleeve simply the original vinyl album cover with the collage of photos, text and measuring instruments reproduced on the front and the dense squinty text (in English, German, Hungarian and Russian) inside. The quality of the CD reissue is amazingly good with no background hiss.

JENNIFER HOR 05/10/2005
Available from www.mimaroglumusicsales.com or www.reckankomplex.com

John Hudak
Room with Sky
JAPAN SPEKK KK: 003 CD (2004)

American sound artist Hudak has contributed to the *phonography.org* compilations and the Geoff Dugan CDs of psychogeographical recordings; but as far as I can determine there are no field recordings on this one, which appears to be just extremely minimal and spacey electronics. A single one-hour piece, *Room With Sky* boasts a Stephan Mathieu production, arrives in a tasteful greeting-card CD pack decorated with a vague wishy-washy abstract pink and green colour-field image. And there's some sort of word-association mini-poem exercise printed inside, which takes the reader from 'room' to 'sky' via words such as 'lamp', 'pillows' and 'books'. Being as I'm a virtual shut-in these days (what's there to go out of the house for?) I'm all in favour of records like this which promise a 'voyage autour de la chambre' and suggest that you can discern the structure of the entire universe by beholding and observing the most simple, domestic objects. Hudak is probably of a like mind. It's rumoured that, rather than turn on the TV, he'd prefer to contemplate an onion for three hours. Those legumes are pretty layered, you know!

Amazingly, the work was produced using recording of Hudak's own voice; it's presented as a 'sculpture' in sound. He was speaking about the



view of the sky from his room, perhaps een reciting the same word-association poem indicated above. He subsequently 'put it through many permutations before arriving at this ending point'. *Room With Sky* could be a very bold minimalist statement. I seem to discern a continuous pattern of notes that are so tiny they're almost like microdots, floating around in gaseous sonic clouds, as though Hudak were hoping to induce in the listener a child-like wonder, the better to appreciate nature's hidden or unnoticed glories. Or perhaps simply induce a state of catalepsy. Imperceptible changes start to accrue. Depending on your patience threshold, you may find this very gradual process very relaxing and something that will lead to improvements in mental health; or you may it completely infuriating.

The work is clearly about some sort of interface with nature, yet it also sounds completely artificial; like a scientific attempt to reproduce nature in conditions where we can control it, much like a mini-vivarium. Certainly, when describing his bedroom, Hudak makes a point of mentioning his Bahaus style casement windows, which seem as important to him as the view of nature they provide. I can see this record being really popular in Japan, where it was originally released before worldwide circulation. Yes, Japan, the home of miniaturisation, where you can compensate for your tiny living quarters by experiencing vast infinite spaces through a 2-inch screen on your mobile, and eating a T-bone steak the size of an aspirin. *Room With Sky* could work in almost any civilised society as a furnishing accessory to your room; it's almost like Ikea Music. It has also been exhibited in 2005 at an art gallery, as part of *New Turf* at the University of Vermont's Fleming Museum. Very good.

ED PINSENT 16/07/2005
www.spekk.net

Masayo Asahara
Saint Catherine Torment
UK DISCUS 19CD CD (2005)

On this, Martin Archer continues the perpetration of his Japanese female alter-ego hoax – and ascribes unto her this hour-long composition called *St Catherine Torment*. Philip Thomas played the prepared piano, Martin Archer played the violectronic, and the resulting bad-tempered and fragmented electro-acoustic composition was edited by Asahara. It starts with piano plucking from the lower register, almost resembling Cecil Taylor in a bad mood with both hands tied behind his back; but since the work is dedicated to Stockhausen, mentor of many, then perhaps *Klavierstucke* is a more appropriate model. There's added percussion and very spare electronic instrumentation, phweeps and groans. Frankly, a dreary start to the day, despite the high-minded ambitions of those who turn this 'wheel'.

By index point 8, it's become something more of a cosmic and echoey electronic workout for the violin instrument-thing. Don't except Tangerine Dream, though – this is mdernistic, atonal and cerebral music, a good effort to deliver a convincing update on the Darmstadt school. Soon, the plunking and jamming is really 'in the groove', combining piano with live electronics in a striking mixture. In fact, the musical tunnel we're led down here is very narrow indeed. It obstinately ploughs a single furrow and relentlessly denies any form of enjoyment, for the most part. It's a long set of very insistent, nagging and monotonous music, which could easily drive you up the wall on a bad day, but I have to admit I do like this rather curmudgeonly side of Archer than his more altruistic, friendly approach. Not that we often see the latter.

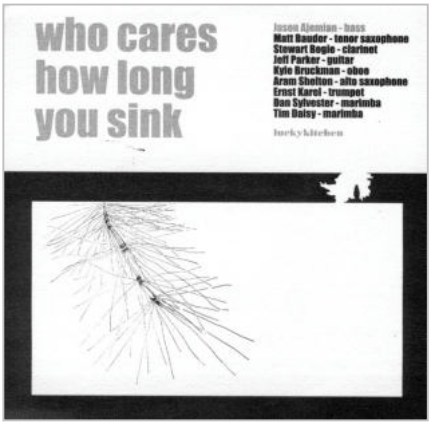
The overall tone of frustration and inhibition continues, mounting in intensity, and you notice how the prepared piano has that blocked-in, cut-off and muffled sound, all adding to this sense of ineffective communication. All of this means it takes some time before the 'Wheel' of the title is actually set in motion. It may happen somewhere around index point 17. Before it starts to spin, there is a lot more 'torment' to get through, mostly of the aural variety. The worst of and the best of Cage and Stockhausen, all provided in one handy pouch of minimal grumbling.

ED PINSENT 19/08/2005
www.discus-music.co.uk

Jason Ajemian
Who Cares How Long You Sink

SPAIN LUCKY KITCHEN lk025 CD (ND)

Latest report in from the 'Sparkling Composers' series on the Lucky Kitchen label; as is customary, this altruistic label (run by fellow musicians, Alejandra and Aeron) continues to provide a platform to unheard music by relative newcomers or non-established players, to give them some exposure. Here are seven compositions of what I suppose to be a modern take on chamber music, played by a small ensemble of acoustic musicians – instrumentation includes tenor sax, clarinet, guitar, oboe, alto sax, trumpet, 2 marimbas and an upright bass. Jason Ajemian is the bassist and composer, and these works were recorded in Chicago; in that town he also plays bass for Triage and Dragons 1976, whose work you can hear on the comp *Document Chicago: New Jazz and Improvisation* (2003).



This is all pleasant stuff and it's well-played by the talented musicians (including a few 'names'), but as a composer Ajemian comes across as someone lacking in life experience. The first track 'For Sake of Arms' is the strongest work in the set. It's charming, elegiac, precise, stately and slow – with very deliberate placement of notes such that small phrases really stand out. What's also interesting is the conflicting range of emotions it evokes – sorrow, mystery, nostalgia, relief, a kind of weary happiness. This may be why it appeals to Lucky Kitchen, who often pride themselves on championing ambiguity and allusiveness in music.

The successive pieces however are progressively much easier to decode, and suggest that Ajemian (for all his skills) is still something of a lightweight; I don't sense any real density or weight to his compositional ideas. The second cut has just two or three simple phrases moving back and forth across each other, in a pleasant but aimless manner, and seems totally linear. 'React One' is a series of long-form brass and woodwind notes, allowing the musicians to sound off in a quite evocative way, but the composition itself is too simplistic. 'Limbs Act' is even simpler, and at first listen could be mistaken for a warming-up exercise with its very basic repeated phrases. There's zero development going on, in either piece.

I like the skeletal framework of 'Octaves and Intervals' – horns gradually added to a bare-bones, near-random structure of bass and marimba notes, and the vague cool-jazz tinge suggested by this instrumentation arrangement (to my superficial way of thinking, it evokes Eric Dolphy's *Out To Lunch*). But there's still not much energy to it; the interest lies purely in the sonic effects, not the performance. In all, this is not a bad effort and has a distinctive feel to it, but is far too low on compositional strengths; the performances sound hesitant, constrained, precious; and ultimately all Ajemian has to offer is a pleasant sound.

ED PINSENT 16/07/2005

Disinformation

Sense Data & Perception

UK IRIS LIGHT i-Light 031 CD EP (2005)

After his stint with the Ash International label, Joe Banks has been in the wilderness for years, dabbling with art exhibition and Internet projects rather than releasing CDs; *The Sound Projector* has enjoyed his sound-art ever since issue three, particularly when it was loud, aggressive and long-formed. Some of his later releases went off the boil slightly however, and then one of his 'discoveries' – the obscure sound mirrors of the UK coast, images of which were almost Banks' trademark – suddenly became more visible, as more people took an interest. (They even appeared on BBC TV this year on a series called *Coast*). Now back on the UK scene, making live appearances (often associated with the editor of *Strange Attractor* magazine), Disinformation releases a new CD. On it, he exhibits his familiar preoccupation with scientific research, and realisation of electronic and electroacoustic sound events through mostly process-based methods. The main change is that now he's allowing himself to add additional layers of recording, and occasionally has a stab at something that sounds like 'music'. I say this without a trace of irony, because Joe Banks has never made any claims to be a 'musician', freely admits his lack of formal training, and advertises his indifference in this area. Rather, his CDs are usually just one part of his larger raft of research, and presented as evidence of scientific phenomena that may or may not result in sound events that are interesting to listen to.

This is a 27-minute EP, mostly comprising works recorded in 2002. The first half has the interesting stuff; quite dramatic openings, including at least one brief musical chord; long drones with added layers of crackle and static for texture. One track (it might be 'Doppelganger' – information on the sleeve is a little ambiguous) has a single piano note, which has presumably been extended by studio technique until it turns into a long drone, which likewise gathers further layers of electronic noise. Worth noting that this is something approaching a formal composition in sound, which is more than he normally manages. I mean it has shape and structure to it, even if it is a minimal shape; in 1997, he'd have been content with turning the VHF receiver on, letting it pick up those groovy trans-acoustic electro-magnetic vibrations from planet Mars (or whatever) for 12 minutes, and then turning it off.

We're back on more familiar turf with the latter half of CD, where we find two pieces which are not mixed or composed, being untreated VHF magnetic-field noise recordings, generated by the passing-by of trains in London. Both pieces are identified by their London geography: 'Bexleyheath to Dartford' and 'London Underground'; some psycho-geographical content is implied, at least. He'll join Iain Sinclair's inner circle yet! The first piece sounds like a minimal crackle alternating with a slightly more wobbly sound, forming a vague rhythm. The second one is a low whine with little bits of static interference. Both are pretty good, but certainly they lack the loud volume and grandeur of his earlier work. Maybe the excitement of discovery (for myself, and for him) has vanished. He used to paint imaginary pictures of a vast, unknowable London, of which he showed us its ghosts, in spectral sound. Now, the city seems small and insignificant. Still, there remains nobody else doing quite what he's doing, or making the sorts of sounds he does, to this day.

The sleeve is, naturally enough, littered with erudite quotes, hinting at the extent of Disinformation's research, and the scope of this particular work. There's something about 'night science' attributed to Francois Jacob, and a metaphysical remark from the Italian novelist Italo Calvino. What any of it has to do with sense, data, or perception is not made explicitly clear, but I would take these quotes as an exhortation to do some reading of your own. Disinformation has published, quite intelligently, on the matter of the rational perception of real things, including perception of sound. A further quote from Ludwig Meiner is a touching lament about hearing eruptions at the base of his skull. If only this CD delivered eruptions in the same way!

ED PINSENT 02/08/2005

Iris Light, 9 Station Walk, Highbridge, Somerset TA9 3HQ, UK

www.irislight.co.uk

Albert Mayr

Proposte Sonore

ITALY ANTS AG08 CD (2004)

Further early minimalism from this Italian experimenter; here are seven works recorded 1966-1969 and one from 1983. 6 of them belong to the Proposta Sonora series. In the enclosed text, the story is told once again of the 2 SF M studio in Florence, confirming our suspicion that in the 1950s and 1960s, electronic music tended to remain in the hands of a small elite. The equipment you needed to do it was expensive, and was installed in establishment places like universities or broadcasting corporations; unless you had an 'in' to those sorts of places, then no

electro-acoustic composition for you. However, Pietro Grossi's 2 SF M studio was private and independent, one of three such places in Italy, and a situation developed which allowed Grossi and his acoylte Mayr to shake some action, tone-generator-wise.

Unfortunately, kindly benefactor Grossi may also have had a bad influence. There's the same problem here as with Grossi's *Battimenti*, in that this record is very little more than pure structure and sound, combinations of frequency tones arranged in strict mathematical patterns, and is consequently extremely dull. The sound is clean and pure, but it's monotonous. *Hora Harmonica*, also by Mayr, also on this label, was also boring in exactly the same way. Follow the grid of numbers, and fall asleep...music with a transcendence factor of zero.

ED PINSENT 24/07/2005
ants.rec@libero.it
www.silenzio-distribuzione.it/ants.htm

The Sonic Catering Band
Seven Transdanubian Recipes
UK PERIPHERAL CONSERVE pH-13 CD (2003)

A bit more interesting than the double CD *Live from the Canteens of Atlantis*, which we received last issue; where that set was extremely quiet, this one at least gives you something you can listen to. And secondly, with the *Atlantis* set, you really had to use your imagination to understand one iota of what Sonic Catering Band were doing, whereas on this one you can actually hear some sounds of cooking taking place. That's their gimmick – sounds created by musicians working with food, and kitchen implements.

Or is it? I'm even more baffled now after hearing this one, and it seems to suggest Sonic Catering Band are more like a clutch of international rebel intellectuals, united by some tenuous interest in the preparation of foodstuffs, and exploring all manner of cabalistic and esoteric avenues of thought thereby. Well, let's start with some facts. You can hear the sounds of frying, boiling, and pouring water on this record, along with some occasional pots and pans and metal oven trays being banged about, plus the motor sounds and other harsh noises you would associate with the use of a food blender or Robochef device. So far so good – all of these make reasonably engaging sonic textures, with the metal components adding a species of percussion. The recordings are strong and clear, only requiring minimal echo treatment to beef them up. One way of 'reading' the disc is as a very mysterious set of field and documentary recordings.

Photographs of those responsible appear in a black-and-white booklet, which also reveals the international membership and recording locations such as Hungary, Slovakia and the UK. The chefs, if indeed this is reliable information, look more live secret agents, or refugees from an episode of *The Champions*. Admittedly, the photographs are contrived and posed, but already something more sinister appears to be taking place. On 'The Alimentary Canal by Night', we're past the stage of hearing cookery sounds; now we hear the massed and overlapping voices of the agency, in a piece of bewildering concrete poetry. What are they reading – recipes? It sounds earnest enough to be mistaken for a coded message, as grim as any radio broadcast from the Conet Project set.

Peter Strickland (who I think is one of the main men) represents the UK contingent, along perhaps with Colin Potter who appears on this record at least; not sure if Potter is a permanent fixture. Strickland may have been responsible for the very lyrical (again, coded) titles for the works, such as 'Table Manners', 'Covert Feeding', 'Lactic Sugar Dream', and – a personal favourite – 'The Lamb is the Light Thereof'. You'll note hints within those titles of some form of secret activity. The last two tracks go even further than coded messages; they are long and ambient droning affairs, where the transformation of normal sounds (perhaps a gas oven firing up?) is akin to something approaching alchemy. There is one long track, followed by a Colin Potter remake of same. An extremely odd record, very blank and baffling. Recorded in 2002-2003; still not sure if this lot are now defunct or what…

ED PINSENT 18/08/2005
www.soniccatering.com

Clare Connors
Rehearsal Tapes 1999/2000
UK PERIPHERAL CONSERVE pH-11 10" LP (2003)

We should give a brief mention to this oddment on the Sonic Catering Band's label, another Peter Strickland related project. Connors plays violin, Colin Fletcher and Tim Kirby add electronics, and they realise two shortish instances of sweetly poignant music that tends to induce nostalgia and sorrow. Recorded with such clarity that the violin almost cuts into your muscle tissue; yet the music has an inner stillness at the core. Short ten-inch LP plays at 45rpm; Strickland did the cover photo depicting pastoral beauty in Bosnia.

ED PINSENT 10/09/2005
www.soniccatering.com

The Jeff Kaiser Ockodektet
13 Themes For a Triskaidekaphobic
USA PFMENTUM CD013 CD (2003)

Ventura seems to be something of a sleepy town, lying about half an hour west of Los Angeles. Or at least it was when I was there briefly. I dimly recall going to see 'Ocean's Twelve' at the local cinema for a reason that now escapes me. It's comes as a slight surprise then that the city has produced a natural over-achiever like composer and trumpeter Jeff Kaiser, who seems to have played with anybody and everybody in Southern California involved in improvised music, and who has more than one ensemble bearing his own name. Here he brings us a large, 18-piece group (as the name would suggest), recorded on his own label PfMentum.

A triskaidekaphobic is, of course, somebody extremely suspicious of the number 13. The CD running time clocks in at one hour, thirteen minutes and thirteen seconds. A conceit taken too far? What I can't figure out is the referencing of Lawrence Stern's 'Tristram Shandy', written in 1799, in the album's track titles. I'm sure it must all fit together snugly somehow. In sound the ockodektet has things in common with a lot of larger improvising ensembles: obviously the Arkestra, but at times this could also be the London Improviser's Orchestra. The similarity possibly stems from the fact that this CD was recorded live at the Venture City Hall, giving it a sound quality not dissimilar to that of the LIO performing at North London's Red Rose.

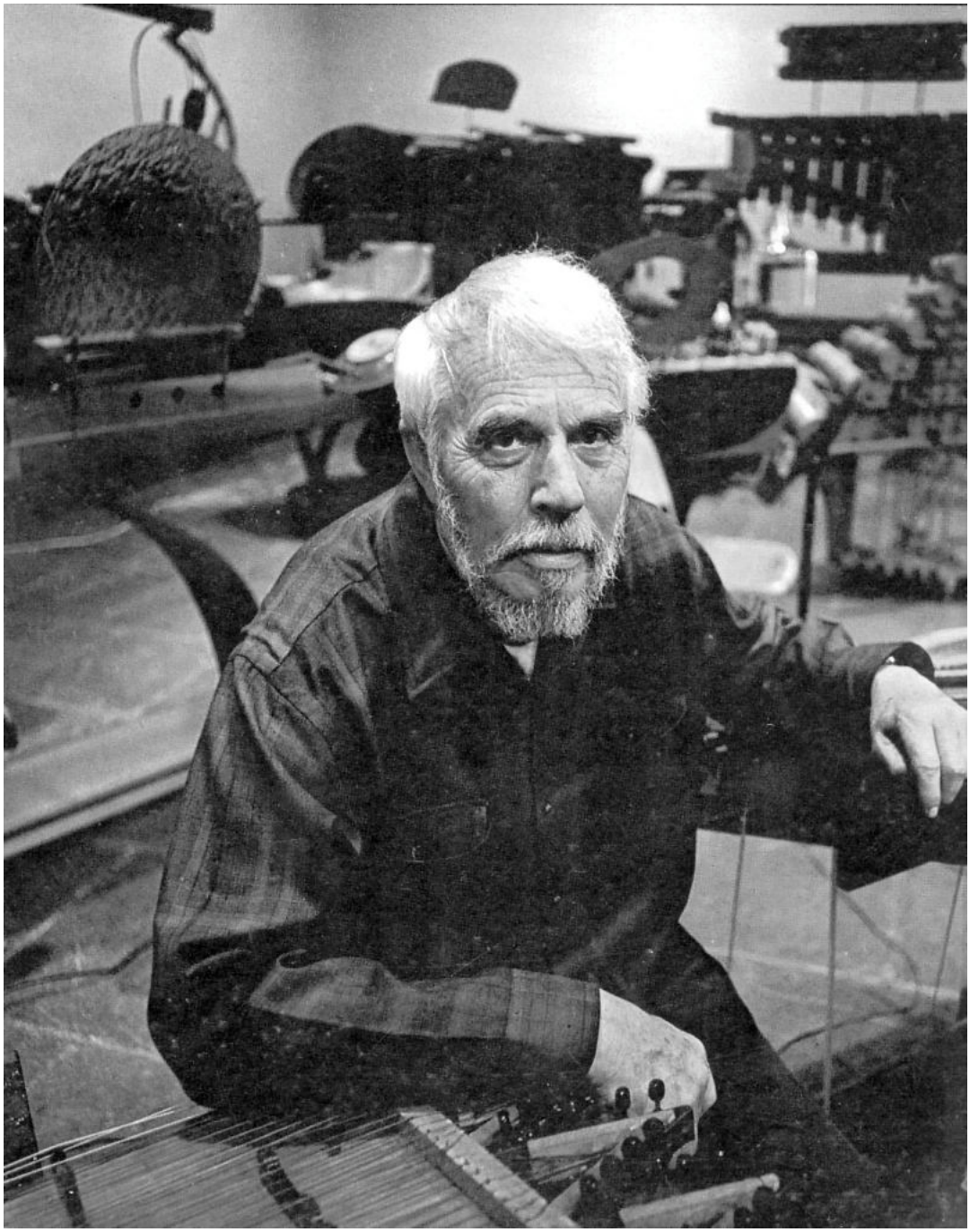
Overall though the ockodektet, hailing from the other (some might say 'wrong') side of the Atlantic, tends to fall back on jazzisms and composed material more often than the LIO ever would. This is perhaps only natural given Kaiser's background in classical training. When he finds the time to teach trumpet I don't know, but that he does apparently according to his website. He also has his own web blog, where he lists amongst his interest's yoga, vegan cooking and the writings of C.J. Jung. You can even check out Jeff's pictures of his recent trip to Yosemite National Park. Oh, and he's a Capricorn. Welcome to the Hotel California.

AARON ROBERTSON
P.O. Box 1653, Ventura, CA 93002, USA
admin@pfmentum.com
www.pfmentum.com

★The Wayward★

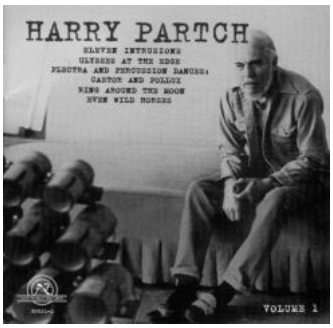
The Music of Harry Partch

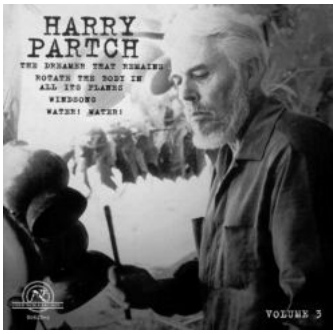
Harry Partch
The Harry Partch Collection Volume 1
USA NEW WORLD RECORDS 80621-2 CD (2004)
The Harry Partch Collection Volume 2
USA NEW WORLD RECORDS 80622-2 CD (2004)
The Harry Partch Collection Volume 3
USA NEW WORLD RECORDS 80623-2 CD (2005)
The Harry Partch Collection Volume 4 : The Bewitched
USA NEW WORLD RECORDS 80624-2 CD (2005)



This concerns the four CDs recently reissued by New World Recordings, originally put out in 1997 on CRI (Composers Recordings Inc), and comprising an excellent selection of the recorded work of Harry Partch. Some of the recordings were formerly only available on his extremely rare Gate 5 private pressing label. These reissues are timely, since it seems the CRI issues are already sold out. There's no difference in the contents on the discs, nor in the booklets; the same photographs are used, although the layouts are slightly different, and the cover artworks made that bit more punchy. The series was originally compiled by Joseph R Dalton, of CRI; and Danlee Mitchell, of The Harry Partch Foundation. Their selections have been themed; all the 'hobo' material is on disc two, most of the ballet works on disc one, music associated with the films and drama on disc three. Disc four is devoted to *The Bewitched*, a major dance-song cycle composition. Alongside the estimable 'Enclosure' series on the INNOVA label, these releases continue to make available a substantial part of the Partch recorded oeuvre.

So much water under the bridge with the music and life of Partch! Let's get some of the obvious stuff out of the way first. (1) The 43-note to the octave thing was but a tiny part of his overall musical ethos; his musical influences came from so many things and places, mostly outside of the conventional classical world's frame of reference. Make no mistake, this guy was a total maverick, and his few brushes with the world of conventional music make it clear that he ended up despising the classical establishment whole-heartedly. Heck, conventional society as a whole had few attractions for him. His ideas about music, which I'm unable to summarise because I don't understand enough about music, are almost completely new and innovative, and his whole life was more than just issuing a challenge to conventional 12-note composition. He wanted *everything* changed! (2) Building his own instruments – the Diamond





Marimba, the Boo, the Cloud-Chamber Bowls, the Kithara, the Harmolodic Canon et al – could be said to be a further expression of same curmudgeonly attitude. Of course they look and sound absolutely beautiful. They are also proving to have been something of an artistic dead-end, since their inventor is no longer around to bring them to life with his original ideas; those instruments are in the hands of Newband who are acting mostly as curators, they're museum pieces now. But the uncanny sounds on these records continue to amaze.

If any of this is true, then Partch's influence on the world of modern classical composition is probably negligible. That's not even the right question to be asking. His influence – perhaps his entire spirit - has been taken up rather by the outcasts, exiles, experimenters and weirdies of modern music, who were inspired by everything he did, the whole package, and attempted to emulate aspects of his life and work. Step forward The Residents, Sun Ra, The LA Free Music Society, Captain Beefheart and The Magic Band, Biota, and AMM. And perhaps this is how it should be. Partch's work rarely entered the conservatoire, the official and 'important' performance venues; maybe we should keep it that way. His legacy is his sound, his stubbornness, his dogged eccentricity; his radical ideas, and his authentic American genius.

Disc one has a lot of the songs and most of the pieces he wrote for ballet performances in 1952. Of the latter, 'Castor and Pollux' is a fantastic brace of lively pieces of lively, skittery percussion for the marimbas and kitharas. Try dancing along at home; you'll need winged feet like Mercury, messenger of the Greek Gods. The jaunty 'Ulysses at the Edge' has a couple of saxophones joining the usual clattery percussion; amusingly, this little ballet ends with Ulysses being arrested by an American cop. 'Even Wild Horses' is based on the work of Rimbaud. He certainly was informed by some erudite themes; this one has some beautiful music and ideas completely at odds with what you'll find in much classical music.

My favourite here though is 'Ring Around The Moon', the first of many (as we'll find) pieces to feature extensive use of American slang words as libretto. Plus it has a nonsense narrative that is delightfully whimsical – there are boxers in a ring, a character appearing armed with a gun. But Partch's boxers have none of the sweat of a George Wesley Bellows painting; this is just nine minutes of vaguely surreal entertainment. Personally my preference is for this wholly American idiom, which few composers before or since have managed to do convincingly, if at all; but then there's no denying the power of his work when it's based on The Classics of literature and poetry, like those above. And of course the 'Eleven Intrusions' are here. These open the disc and are, to my ears, a bit dreary, but you can't beat the unique sound of the Partch intoning voice. I tell you, there's no sound like that anywhere else in the history of recorded voices! I thought these poems were inspired by his readings of the Li Po poems, but I'm getting confused with something else.

Rather, 'Eleven Intrusions' reflect a period of introversion and loneliness, and are among the most personal pieces he ever wrote. Much has been made of the 'Zen' influence on Partch, but however much he loved the philosophy, it certainly failed to pass on any serenity or lasting peace in his own life. On the contrary, most of the music on these four discs is restless, impatient for change, evidence of a fervent mind that couldn't sit still and was never satisfied. Can you imagine having breakfast with him in the morning?

Well, if you can't, then the most accurate 'slice of life' stuff might be found in the musical portraits on disc two. Listen to this and you can get to know the real Harry Partch! These contain musical artworks directly inspired by his hobo life, when he dropped out of society in the 1930s during the great depression, rode the rails, and consorted with the prune-pickers. It has to be said he was also able to drop back *in*, but that doesn't devalue his behaviour, nor any of his musical work. There's a long suite of music called 'The Wayward', wherein most of the pieces were composed in 1941 and 1943, with some added revisions made in 1955, 1968 and 1972.

On 'The Wayward' as with other works inspired by this phase of his life, Partch successfully gives a voice to the dispossessed, the common man, and manages to insert it into his art. Herein be transcriptions of phrases uttered by hoboes, newsboys, train conductors, railway depot inspectors; and graffiti inscriptions, faithfully copied from where he found them, made into a highly unconventional 'libretto' and put into musical settings. Another thing he was able to do was reproduce the actual cadences of a speaking voice via musical transcription; some evidence of it can be found on these works. Again, as far as I know, Partch remains unique in doing this in music. In painting, the closest thing in both spirit and contemporaneity might be the 'Ashcan' school of painters (Robert Henri, John Sloan et al, and those influenced by said school, like Reginald Marsh). Since the 1940s of course, we jaded consumers have since been confronted with even more radical and outspoken works dedicated to narrowing the gap between art and real life; and many other artists (William Burroughs springs to mind) have delved even further into Partch's turf, exploring what polite society would regard as sordid, low culture. But I bet you anything that in the 1940s, what Partch was doing was shockingly new.

'US Highball' is the meisterwerk here, a complete success in every regard. A totally impressionistic vision of his itinerant journeys, telling many stories, not just one; and arranged in a far from linear fashion. The percussive music emulates the sound of the train, even as it goes over bumps; voices are pasted on it throughout, tons of American argot and slang, and the sour complaints of hobos as they try to get some peace. Indeed the subtext is the very lack of peace these dispossessed guys had in their lives; if it isn't a bumpy train ride, it's the 'bulls' (railway police) hounding them out of the depot, or the rules and regulations of the flop-house (likewise, fully transcribed from life and forming part of the 'libretto') telling them what to do. Also references to the changing weather, and to place names of passing stations; it's a movie in sound, a painting in full colour, of a vanished America. Partch turns it all into sheer poetry, and the life of poverty and degradation never seemed so romantic!

When he applies his transcription skills to the newsboy cries, the results are downright bizarre – the voices are haunting and distant, the musical setting eerie and gloomy, as befits the 'foggy night' of its locale. A tiny fragment of life which most would regard as so commonplace to be beneath worthy of their notice, even; in Partch's hands, a moment of rare beauty. 'The Letter' contains a picaresque tale of displacement in 1930s America, packed with bizarre detail; Jack Kerouac could only dream of scribing such an episode. Certainly he wouldn't have been so concise. The full title of this 1943 work is 'San Francisco – A Setting of the Cries of Two Newsboys on a Foggy Night in the Twenties'.

'Barstow' is the graffiti piece and I think might be fairly well-known. I have another version on a 1978 LP (*Music of Harry Partch and John Cage*, NW 214) where the vocal performances are quite as 'acted' as they are here, but this version could grow on me; it's the kind of dramatic song-speech which is surprisingly hard for singers to do, especially if they've been classically trained. The piece starts out with actual roadside graffiti from hitch-hikers, waiting to catch a ride, and not getting anywhere; from these, Partch spins his musical song-fantasies. Again, it's a successful attempt to reinscribe 'lost' voices into art. You may also want to hear the later opera *Delusion Of The Fury* (not here) wherein he revisits the hobo theme on a grander and yet more fantastic scale.

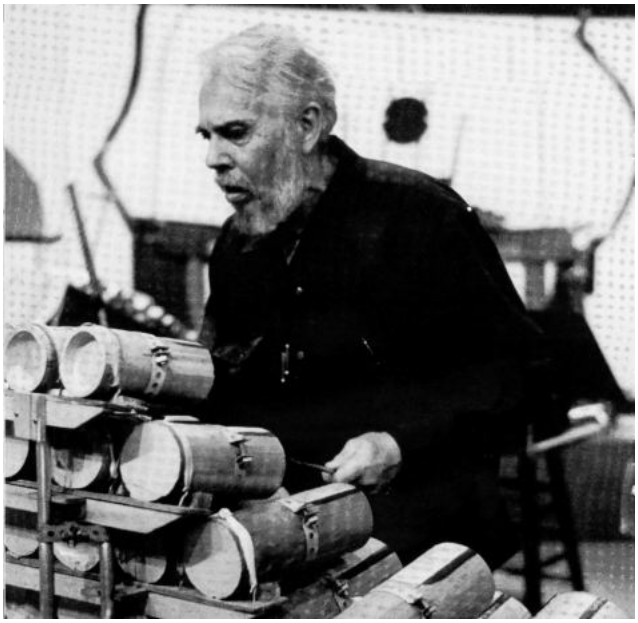
Incidentally I wanted to point out that 1940s recordings of 'Barstow',

'Newsboy Cries' and 'US Highball' appeared on *Enclosure Two* (INNOVA 401), in 1995. Many of these feature Partch himself as the prominent performer and singer, dating from a time when he hadn't yet built up a core of other musicians he could trust. The sound quality on these early recordings may be muffled and patchy, but the performances are arguably better and more radical examples of the music.

Also on this disc – it's packed with good stuff! – is the amazing 'Petals Fell on Petaluma', which was for a time available as an LP (CRI SD 213), and was the first Partch music I ever heard. At that time, the elaborate structure of this one made me think he might be an early form of 'systems' composer (kind of a precursor to Philip Glass), though of course he is nothing of the sort. The 34 short, intense instrumentals are re-performed and replayed in layers and combinations according to a mathematical grid system. (Said system is explained in booklet; I wonder if the musicians did all the overlays live, or used overdubbing?) With its brilliant cross-rhythms and increasing complexity, 'Petals' is unique…to this day I've encountered nothing that matches it, the dynamics are incredible, the sound of it is amazing. Mad chimes and doorbells, weird detuned strings, floating and skittering sounds…it never stops changing. Despite the layered trickiness, and the initial sense of near-chaos, it is actually extremely precise in its thought-through composition, and its execution. For what it's worth, this was probably the major influence on The Residents' *Fingerprince* LP. This *Volume Two* is a total winner, in case you can only afford to buy one of the set!

There are four major compositions on *Volume Three* – these are ones that intersect with the worlds of drama, ballet and film. 'The Dreamer That Remains', from 1972, is Partch's final composed work. Stephen Pouliot used the same title when he made a 27-minute film of the life of Partch. This piece starts out as a mild satire on contemporary mores; the signs in the park say 'Do Not Loiter'. Partch, as ever, makes his characters fume with indignation at this petty restriction imposed by 'polite' society. We're back to the hoboes, grumbling under the flophouse regulations in 'US Highball'. Partch goes further this time, taking it really personally, interpreting 'do not loiter' as an admonition against lovers appearing in public. This one has been identified (not by me) as the first if not only openly 'out' statement about his gayness to appear in his work. Make of that what you will, but it is a touching and very personal piece of music, and his own 'intoning' voice adds poignancy to it.

'Rotate the Body in all its Planes', naturally enough turns out to be a ballet score for gymnasts. Madeleine Tourtelot made a film by this title in 1961, which I think was also reissued on VHS as part of the *Enclosure* series. This score has a triumphant feeling – you can visualise the gymnasts trouping out to assault the parallel bars with gusto – and features a soprano lead singer, and more conventional instrumentation (eg brass, piccolos) among the Partch orchestra. 'Windsong', from 1958, is one of those rare recordings where Partch plays every single instrument on it. In the liner notes, little information is given about the technical side of this and I'd love to hear more (was overdubbing used?), but this is another delightfully mournful piece of music. Very much in evidence here is the tremendous range of subtleties to be found in his tuned percussion instruments alone; these inventions of his didn't



reinvent the wheel completely, but added improvements. It's taken me years of listening to Partch to appreciate this sort of thing; at first it all seems so 'loud', but that's because it's so shockingly different. Acclimatise yourself to that difference, and you can tune in to what he was doing.

'Water! Water!' is the longest piece on this disc at 38 minutes; even so it's edited highlights, excerpts from a much longer 1961 piece for the stage. Layered with loads of elements and ideas, this contemporary satire comes across as an avant-garde spoof of a Broadway production. There's a large cast of singers, and once again conventional chamber instruments (violins, clarinets, trumpets, cellos and bass) sit alongside the Partch orchestra; there's even a small jazz band in here. Consequently, the whole piece is a real circus; the songs and music all have a very entertaining 'swagger'. There seem to be no end of crazy stories, subtexts and characters running riot here; there's more instances of Yankee argot, lovely phrases like 'Laughing Academy', and even a baseball game interlude! One theme, a persistent one it seems now, is Partch railing against all the squares and the straights in society who tell him what he can't do in his life. For the most part, such 'normals' are lampooned as prissy, strait-laced schoolmarms. An obvious ploy really, but it worked for him - even if some of the things that got him so cross seem a little quaint now. Even the title of this work is having a pop at conventional concert-goers; the idea is that they don't have the brains or the stamina to really appreciate music, and the only thing they're thinking about is the interval when they can dash out for a drink of water. This is still just as true now, though if I know London audiences we'd have to change 'Water' to 'Quintuple Vodka' or 'large bottle of imported beer'. Another good reason to own this disc is that the original vinyl recordings of 'Water! Water' are extremely scarce – Partch did issue it on Gate 5, then withdrew it almost immediately due to dissatisfaction with the recording quality.

And so to the final disc, *The Bewitched*, another major dance piece. I don't know if I'm alone in finding this record pretty sub-standard Partch; I've had a vinyl copy of the same recording for years and hardly ever play it. It's the original 1957 recording, supervised by Partch and issued by him, so presumably he was happy with it. I find it quiet and muffled; the performance seems lacklustre and restrained. It's too much like conventional modern music, particularly with the strong presence of conventional chamber instruments which, on this occasion, seem to outweigh the Partch orchestra. There's lots of singing and a chorus; I've never managed to follow the plot of the story of this one. Hard to believe that this largely joyless stodge is intended as a satyr-play; a form of Greek drama usually associated with something far more lively and libidinous! 'Satire, whimsy, magic, ribaldry' are all here, claims the composer; yet all these elements seem lacking to me. I need to dig a bit deeper into this, but I do find it the hardest to engage with. Besides being inspired by Greek theatre's music and dance performance traditions, it also borrows heavily from similar traditions found in Africa, Bali, and Chinese opera.

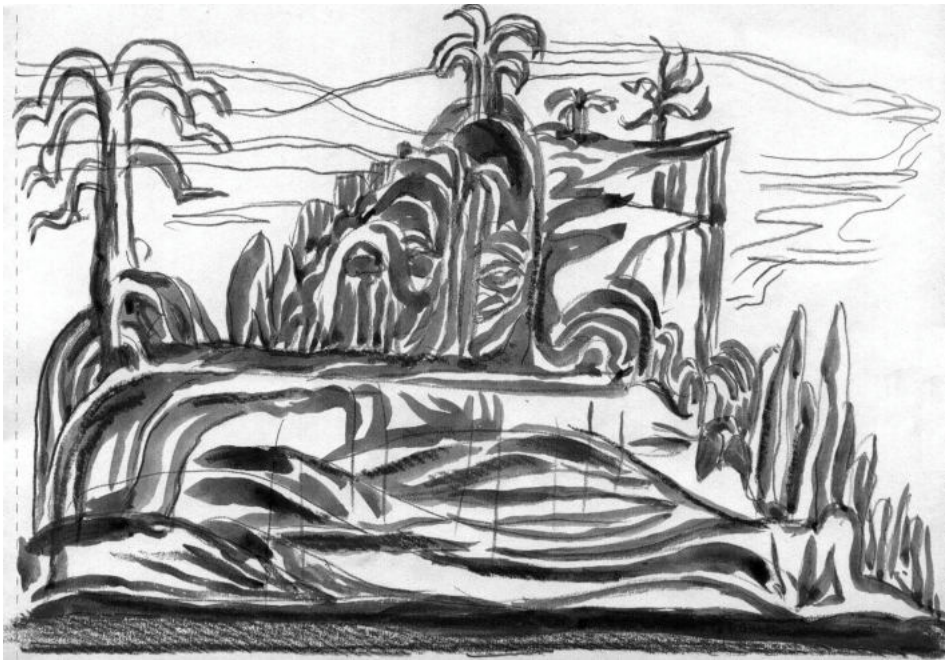
A real landmark set of releases confirming the status of this genuinely inventive and (for a long time) very difficult composer. There's never been a better time to discover his work.

ED PINSENT 21-26/09/2005
www.newworldrecords.org
www.corporeal.com

Field recordings

ENVIRONMENTAL AND DOCUMENTARY RECORDINGS ABOUND FROM THESE TRAVELLING SCARECROWS!

Andrew Kötting
Shanghai Frolic
UK VERTIGO NO NUMBER CD (2004)



Andrew Kötting's previous project was *Visionary Landscapes*, themed on English Folk song, realised with the help of a member of The Pogues, and part of a *son et lumiere* display at Cecil Sharp House. This new project is somewhat different – there's not so much music involved with *Shanghai Frolic*, but it is still excellent, full of the same excitement with sound and the same revelatory qualities. He's working with a collection of documentary recordings from Shanghai, captured by himself when living in said part of world. He went on bicycle rides to see what he could see, and made the recordings using only a small dictaphone. Raw material was then fetched back to studio, reprocessed, and given back to the world with the introduction of additional found elements.

Result is fascinating; a lot more than just another 'impressionistic' collage of a bustling urban landscape, which if we're honest a lot of documentary sound-artists seem happy to settle for nowadays, content to bring back something that's little more than an aural home movie. Indeed, the more 'exotic' the locale, the less editing takes place – perhaps in the belief that the recordings themselves present enough interesting information. Kötting, however, is trying to do a little more than that. Besides the extensive editing and selection that must have taken place to arrive at this concise statement, he also uses repeats and loops quite frequently, in order to restate or emphasise the sound-events he likes most. (Looping is usually considered off-limits for a purist field recording artist; it might detract from the continuity of the work.) He also editorialises, framing each episode with sampled snippets taken from (I suppose) foreign language records, with their commonplace phrases enunciated in an affected way. All of these said snippets have likewise been carefully chosen; they refer to the act of listening, or the act of talking; and they have also inspired the track titles.

As indicated, there's more real-time recordings than music going on here, although the third track does feature an extended (and quite remarkable) performance of what I take to be traditional Chinese music and singing, performed in the street – or wherever he found it. This is the longest that he allows his dictaphone to run in a single take; the remainder of the CD seems to comprise careful editing and assemblage. Co-produced with *Vertigo* magazine and The British Council, for whom Kötting has also made several short films. An extremely intelligent and rewarding piece of work. A signed and limited hand-made art edition is also available through the e-mail below.

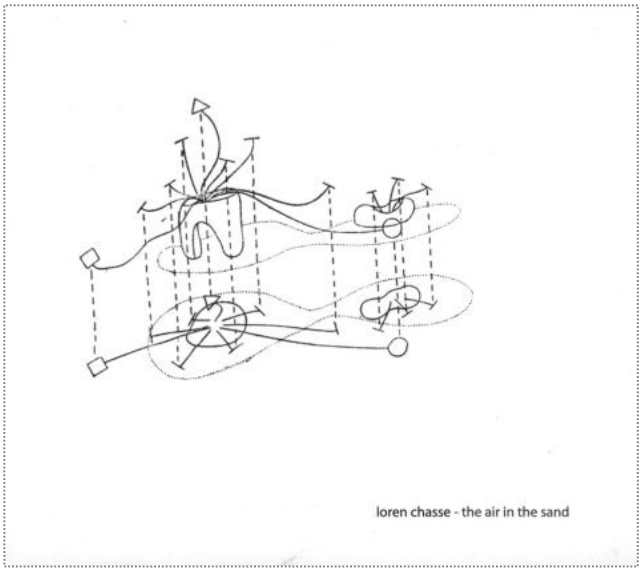
ED PINSENT 18/09/2005
www.vertigomagazine.com
badbloodandsibyl@ukonline.co.uk

Justin Bennett / Toshiya Tsunoda
Cacerolada / Cleavage of Acoustics
THE NETHERLANDS STICHTING MIXER MLP.03 LP (2005)

One of two recent split LPs recently issued on this label, and this one brings together field recordings by two renowned performers in this area. The Bennett piece is 'Cacerolada', an intensive field recording fetched back from foreign climes. I listened to it 'blind' without reading up first (which is often a good way to work), and was immediately impressed by what seemed to be an unedited documentary of some wild metal-bashing percussion event, taking place in the street, with added sirens and car horns. Football fans, or protesters maybe? As it turns out the latter is correct – this was a noise-protest launched against the Iraq war, recorded in Barcelona, where the local inhabitants know what's what about raising their collective voice to get results. Yep, there was fear and trembling in the Town Halls of Spain that day! It's a fine stirring din that Bennett has committed to vinyl, bordering on the alarming…it's a good job they're on our side. Ironically, the piece ends with a whoop of triumph from one self-assured protester, only to be succeeded by a few yaps from a stray barking dog. These barks close the record; the 'dogs of war' get the last word. To me, this means that the forces of aggression may have triumphed in the end, despite all that noisy protest. However, I also doubt that this symbolic interpretation is aligned with Justin's intent, because he's really only interested in the pure sonic qualities of the noises he captures.

Toshiya Tsunoda may have felt the rough side of my critic's tongue lately, but he has more than redeemed himself in my book with this track, called 'Cleavage of Acoustics'. Personally, I can't enough of that cleavage. It starts with Tsunoda's familiar nature-derived recordings, using water, wind and birdsong, but through his ingenious electro-acoustic reworkings it quickly becomes transformed into something harsh and insufferable, in a very good way – intense episodes of chattering and shrill racket. It's like finding yourself in the midst of an impossibly large swarm of gigantic insects, engaged in eating each other in various ways. Fine work! The title is something to do with the artist's oblique view of recording nature. He perceives sound-events, or recordings of them, as constituting a complex bed of strata. He would like to slice across that strata of sound, to reveal all of its layers. (This probably explains why his wife never asks him to cut the cake at a tea-party.) Somehow he succeeds in making a more directed statement than Bennett's side, but all the same it makes for a really effective combination. All this and it's on vinyl too. Try and find a copy.

ED PINSENT 17/07/2005



Loren Chasse

The Air in the Sand

AUSTRALIA NATURESTRIP NS3004 CD (2005)

About time that this semi-mystical guru of field recordings was recognised with his own solo release on Naturestrip, the Australian label currently trying to corner the market in this valuable musical commodity. Chasse is a paid-up member of the Jewelled Antler collective, he used to be id battery (with Brandon Labelle) and is still I think Coelacanth with Jim Haynes. For this well above-average field recording record, he collects atmospheres and sound events from his exotic overseas travels, utilising 'analog and digital recording devices [and] battery-operated amplification', and then proceeds to do something clever about playing them back and re-recording them, perhaps doing this in new locations. If this is true, then think of the possibilities...today's beach may be tomorrow's forest!

This unique approach may be how he achieves the highly-processed and (at times) quite uncanny sound quality on this record. It's like seeing twice as much sky, feeling twice the volume of oxygen in the air. Of course, I don't know if any of this is true, but it still sounds glorious. Six tracks, whose titles refer in very Zen-like ways to air, sand, earth, trees, sky, water and rain...a gorgeous set of tone poems devoted to Mother Earth. If you have heard Coelacanth's work (which I recommend) but found it a bit too opaque, this may appeal to you as a starting point; it's not quite as far-out and offers some deliciously soothing sounds. Some elements are more 'recognisable' than he usually allows, unless I'm just getting used to it, but it's all quite sumptuous, refreshing as morning air and sunlight streaming through your open window. A must for all nature lovers.

ED PINSENT 21/08/2005
www.naturestrip.com

mnortham

molecular knot phase one

SWITZERLAND CLOUD OF STATICS COSm05.01 3" CD (ND)

This is one of a whole series of dinky mini-CDS from the Swiss label, all adhering to a vague 'theme' involving natural history and its place in the cosmos, and all arriving in attractive packaging. They're mini-CDs pressed into full-size discs, using the additional space gained to present attractive abstract designs etched on. Musically, they don't all hit the target, but I always like to hear the latest reports from Michael Northam, this loopy American sonic explorer. His package is adorned with abstracted images of nature, growths and plants rendered into odd twisting lines and superimposed onto a blurry photograph. This is a visual analogue to what mnortham does with his highly-treated and abstracted field recordings. This one derives from a 'sesh' with Seth Nehil, his gifted partner in crime. They got together at a very specific location – the Mizpah chapel in Portland, Orgeon – there to record a percussion event using zithers and other objects. Subsequent recordings were 'massively layered'. That's putting it mildly!

From a distance, mnortham's brand of digital manipulation may seem to amount to little more than a dull monolithic drone, but in fact it's teeming with lots of finely-crafted detail – like mosquitoes flying in a shaft of sunlight. Listen closely and you can make out the myriad tiny bells and wind chimes (or digital emulation of same). This suggests the way that a caterpillar or stag beetle might perceive a clutch of wild bluebells growing in the forest. For further information, simply watch *Wildlife On One* – or wear a special helmet that makes you see things the same way as a beetle.

Unlike so many contemporaries who get lost somewhere in the absorbing process of working at their editing suites, mnortham is on another plane altogether - a man who deals in molecules, gathers their strings in his hands and ties them all into a knot. Hence the title. A short and static piece, but filled with scale – vast and cavernous moaning.

ED PINSENT 09/07/2005
www.cloudmirror.org

Yannick Dauby

Alisen

SWITZERLAND CLOUD OF STATICS COSm04.01 CD (ND)

This is a recording of high frequency acoustic feedback phenomena. Dauby originally did it in STEIM studio in Amsterdam. For him, it is

typically mysterious and an opaque piece of sound art, which once again presents the exploration of a microscopic domain. It takes you inside a world that is hermetically sealed off. Planes and textures and blocks of sound interlock with each other, to form this miniature cosmos. The surface of this world is scrutinised with great intensity from our curious sound-scientist. It's no exaggeration to state that Dauby practically composes using an electron microscope. The exact opposite of Kosmische styled synth-noodling, his music is not about 'deep outer space', but forces us deep within to examine the atomic structures of strange and steely elements. Neither is it 'fantasy' music, escaping from reality; on the contrary, his work seems very materialist. This guy really is a 16th-century Alchemist, a metaphysician in sound art. A strong statement and another excellent release on Cloud of Statics.

ED PINSENT 31/07/2005
www.cloudmirror.org

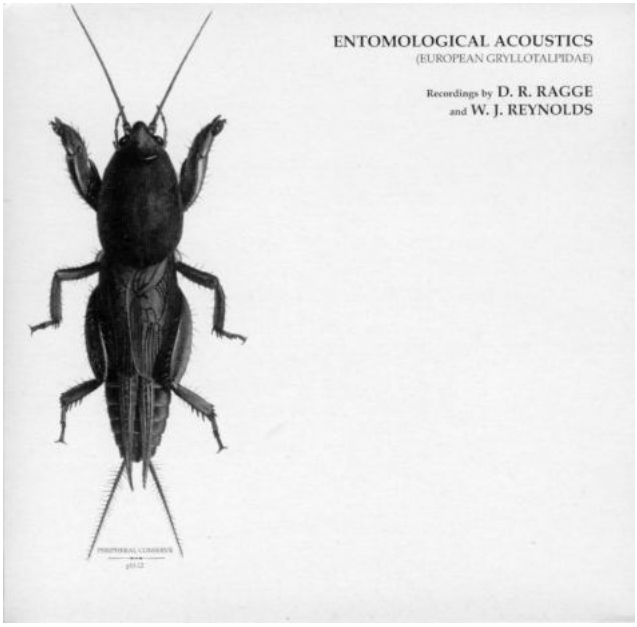
(os)
What Those Ingredients Are
UK SIJIS RECORDS SIJIS11 CD (2004)

A baffling artiste name and project title here, but a goodly record. If titles given to pieces be true, we have a set of field recordings captured from urban and industrial environments; including for example a tunnel, streets, a garage, and a harbour, all taken from endroits mostly situated in California. 'Stockton Tunnel A' generates a hearty drone with additional sonic 'grit' provided by unidentified clanking and a sandpapery rustling; it's an irresistible noise, creating sheer poetry from the modern industrial world. He'd like to think of it as 'feedback Gamelan'. The third track also documents some form of life on the street; the traffic sound is a bit of a cliché in this particular field of art, but we also have a form of 'source music' as it were, the sound of a piano perhaps being played in some distant loft. Pretty compelling. On the fourth cut, it's become so abstracted that it's far from clear what we're actually hearing, but that matters not – there's a real 'gravitas' to the soaring/droning noises.

Creator Steve Polta (os) is from San Francisco, and realised these works using very cheap contact microphones – sometimes even attaching them to static parts of the environment, like tunnel railguards. On the second cut this strategy becomes most apparent – the sound of a contact mic attached to a coat, picking up natural sounds of breathing, walking, air rushing past…again, something of a cliché perhaps, but his economical approach has a certain honesty and rigour that adds greatly to the project. In the final analysis, he is like a fishman casting a very wide net – he accepts everything his devices bring in, and allows the listener to wander among the subsequent harvest, regardless of what debris may have accumulated in the process.

The final piece 'BART fr East Bay' is the 17-minute magnum opus, I suspect captured mostly from a train journey, where said train is at a stop and various announcements are audible – along with grumbling remarks from bored passengers. This track contains something of the 'veiled aggression' that the label is hoping for with this release, a picture of the boredom and banality which accompanies the daily commute. Really captures that 'open air' feeling, as does most of this CD – it brings the California sunshine right indoors. 'BART' combines these barely audible voices of the public with the strange rumbling engine noises of the train at standstill to produce a very strong piece, with a skeletal 'storyline' for added interest. Steve Polta is a film maker as well as a sound artist, so this narrative dimension makes sense. A good semi-documentary set, filled with a strange poetry and finding examples of natural music in the oddest places, as most good field recording work does.

ED PINSENT 16/07/2005
www.sijis.com



D R Ragge / W J Reynolds
Entomological Acoustics
UK PERIPHERAL CONSERVE pH-12 7" (2003)

A terrific insect 45 released on the Sonic Catering Band's label. Rescued from the National Sound Archive of the UK, here be two short field recordings of genuine insectimoid beasties done by qualified experts, David Ragge from the Natural History Museum and Zoology grad J Reynolds. Both recordings are of Mole Crickets; there's plenty of factual information on the cover, each recording documented to high archival standards. Side one was recorded in 1968, side two a bit more recently... and they sound fantastic! Beautiful noises, not tarted up, magnified or recontextualised (except perhaps by being released as a single this way), just nature in the raw. The recent recording is especially vivid, the rasping tones put the insect right there in the room with you. Good insect pictures on the covers too. If you fear insects, stay away. Or learn to embrace their alien properties. Highly recommended.

ED PINSENT 26/08/2005
www.soniccatering.com

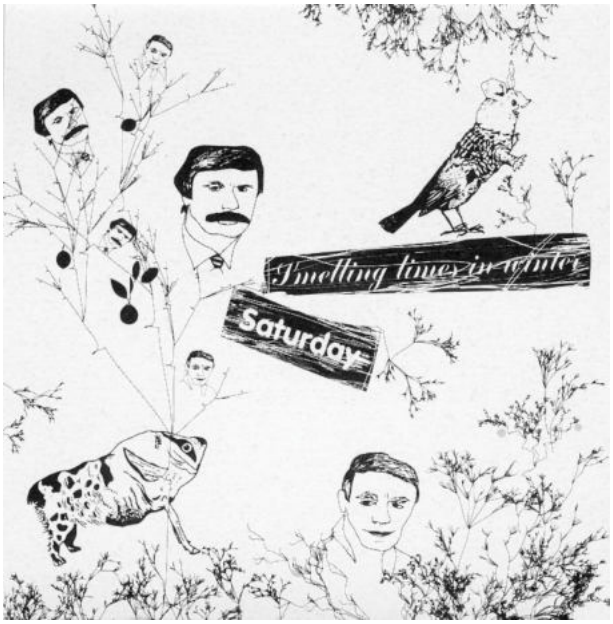
Andrea Ermke
Pike
GERMANY ZAREK 09 CD (2004)

Many unusual things get washed down the pike in course of making their way to the *Sound Projector* box. This *Pike* is more than welcome. In this short work from 2004, recorded in Berlin, this puzzling German lassie sees fit to plaster us with snippets of field and documentary recordings - fragmentary, chaotic and vaguely alarming, all stitched and layered together into a constantly shape-shifting flow. At times, the experience can be pretty intense – a textural roller-coaster ride, extremely vivid, but also clearly composed and well-ordered. Indeed, as disc progresses,

the real intelligence in the organisation of the material becomes more obvious; a real slap in the face for 'academic' electro-acoustic material often found on Metamkine, *Pike* is more informed by the dance floor and the street than by the stuffy old rulebook of IRCAM. She's also self-taught and has taken influence from Australian sound art, rather than settling for anything she found in Berlin. Ermke used to be in Guest Star and Cox Orange and sometimes performs in Organic and Tree.

An Ignaz Schick production and released on his own ZAREK label; welcome return of said Schick. He has released rather troubling paranoid records of guitar and electronics and percussion that I enjoyed. *Pike*, in like manner, has an edgy and frantic feel, as though modern life is happening too fast to cope with, and everything is about to fall apart. Fortunately, said frantic pace slows down in the middle where Ermke's thread of thought becomes somewhat more reflective, if not downright surreal. A strong artistic mosaic, executed only with sampler, minidisc and field recordings…and scads of imagination. A fab miniature gem.

ED PINSENT 09/07/2005
www.zangimusic.de

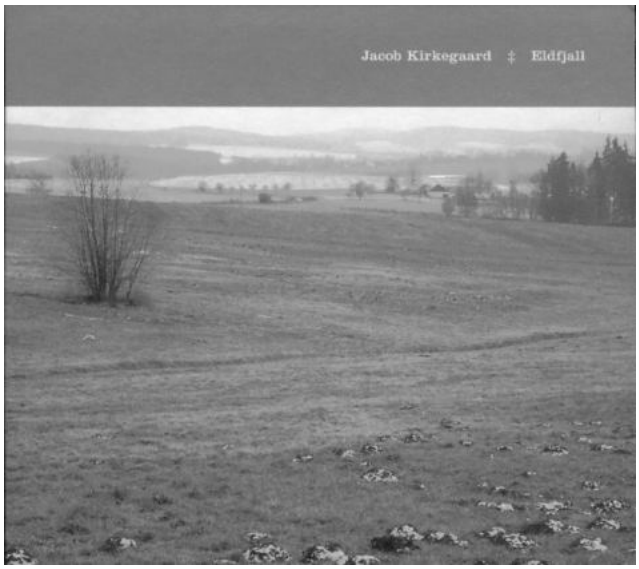


Jacob Kirkegaard

Eldfjall

UK TOUCH T33.20 CD (2005)

Jacob Kirkegaard is one of the more interesting artistes on this label's roster at the moment. He's also collaborated with labelmate Philip Jeck. This release is potentially interesting – recordings of vibrations in the ground, caused by volcanic activity and geysers, recorded in Iceland. He did it using devices called accelerometers, devices used to measure vibrations – normally in heavy machinery in factories and plants. This is almost archetypal as regards subject matter of interest to the Touch label, as has been exhibited in previous releases by Chris Watson, BJNilsen and Disinformation: I mean a strong interest in the environment, in hearing things that normally you can't hear, and in scientific instruments and applications, normally used for measuring data in some other context, pressed into service as generators or recorders



of interesting sonic events.

On paper, this sounds like it can't fail. The record, however, is interminably dull. You hear lots of low rumbling and crackling, and a sort of slow bubbling noise as if the trolls who live beneath the ground in these Nordic lands were percolating their morning coffee in a huge urn. And then they won't even pour a cup for you to share! It's pure documentary sound, with almost zero 'musical' value. Very little sense of drama, although 'Nerthus' gets a little more agitated; but generally the sound on offer is totally inert, with not much more for you to appreciate than some mildly interesting textures. At least the 'Earth Artists' of the 1970s, for all their pomposity and boring endeavours, did a little more than expect us to be amazed by the texture of the soil they were working with. Considering the tremendous power that resides at the earth's core (just ask Jules Verne!), you'd have thought Kierkegaard could fetch back something more engaging than this tedious drivel. Now I think I'll go and jump in the crater. See you later.

ED PINSENT 17/07/2005
www.touchmusic.org.uk
www.fonik.dk/

Osso Bucco / Ljudbilden & Piloten

Osso Bucco / Ljudbilden & Piloten

SWEDEN NOSORDO nsrd001 CD (2003)

A split CD from this Swedish label. The first four cuts are by Osso Busso, aka Gregg Kowalsky (born in NYC) – they are nice enough monotonous electronic droning, sometimes interwoven with field recordings which are indistinct and unidentifiable. Nothing much here to amaze the lugs, but he does manage to invoke through his simple combinations a certain nostalgia and a sense of forgotten, sun-drenched vistas; sure enough, his works purport to be 'highly influenced by the thick, humid air of South Florida where Gregg lived for most of his life'. He does it using a computer and his field recording tapes; friends join him on guitar and melodica for a couple of tracks. He likes the idea of balancing the organic with the inorganic. Which reminds me, I must decant some more fruit into my ceramic fruit bowl.

Ljudbilden and Piloten is, despite appearances, actually another solo turn, Kristofer Ström. He too makes pleasant combinations of tasteful instrumentals with his field recordings, but he adds lots more instruments – keyboards, guitars, percussion, trumpets. Pretty heavy on the acoustic guitars, in fact. For some reason, it all reminds me of side two of Pink Floyd's *Atom Heart Mother* LP. His work likewise evokes some kind of nostalgia (and not just for 70s prog), but it's far too tasteful for these ears. The cover artworks lead one to expect music that is somewhat more adventurous; it displays images of odd cut-ups and collages, animal and insect parts, heads growing from trees…but this is from another contributor. The music has none of the spirit of playfulness of these imagistic hybrids.

ED PINSENT 13/07/2005
www.nosordo.com

I HATE FREEDOM!

By SCOTT FOUST

LAST MARCH ('05), I DECIDED TO leave the house early (7:30 AM) to avoid scheduled workmen. I am always up until dawn, but I do not enjoy strangers tromping through the house. I decided to walk the 50 minutes to the UMASS Library and spend the day doing research in the European History Dept. Quite near the library tower is a football field-sized pond, which was filled with gaggling geese. There are a bunch of permanent ducks that always keep a corner of the pond ice free, but, despite the cold, the entire pond was open and full of activity. Since I do not enjoy smoking next to the entrance of a building like some vagrant, I sat down on a bench near the pond to enjoy the show. The geese puttered on beautifully. Right about the time I lit Dunhill #2, the intensity started to pick up. It was riveting. Soon, the occasional goose would stand up out of the water, flap, and yell loudly. The sound and fury kept building until finally a wedge of geese headed off. The tempest continued until six or seven groups had departed, leaving a much smaller contingent behind to secure the water. I wished I'd had a recording device, or at least some whiskey. It sounded excellent. On my way up to the tower and up to my floor, I thought about free improvisation.

The flow and structure of the geese reminded me a lot of the flow and structure of a lot of free improvisation, whatever the genre (jazz, rock, noise, minimal plinky plonk, etc). Free improvisation's defenders will no doubt say that the music is so free that it has no structure, but a few live shows or a few recordings will reveal, even to the dullest of ears, that most so-called freely improvised music falls into easily recognizable organizational structures. It either goes for the very common build up/let down scenario, the even more common 'call and response' scheme or for the static structure. Presumably, when adherents refer to a lack of structure, what they mean is a lack of a planned structure. Oddly enough, this lack of structure, despite its deployment in the name of 'freedom', is much more restrictive of the final output than composed, semi-composed, or EDITED music. Precision, dynamics (and/or lack thereof), not to mention atmosphere and drama, are just not easily available to the free improviser. Certainly, free improvisation is a fine showcase for a certain macho athleticism of technique, the endless, pointless displays of a played-out, ineffectual, sense of 'rugged individualism'. Dull, dull, dull. Laziness should never be mistaken for discipline. Cleverness should never be mistaken for atmosphere. This is what music does best. The Good Ship Free Improvisation cannot turn on a dime, and yet, at the same time, has difficulty (by definition) keeping a straight course.

Of course, I am not for a moment suggesting that improvisation is without value. Structures and modes of organizing sound do not emerge from a vacuum. Experimentation is the way advances come about. Even strictly written music involves interpretation by both the players and conductor. I, myself, do not read music. When I do recording, for example with Idea Fire Company, we often mess about with all sorts of ideas, some of which are freely improvised. However. The recordings are always heavily edited and sequenced before I expect others to spend time with them. For live performances, I've always preferred some sort of song/piece structure, however loose. I think variations between performances of the same piece of music are more interesting than constant 'total innovation' - which really isn't at all.

In the arts in the past, improvisation meant taking a few words or a few notes plucked out by a nobleman and constructing a structured sonnet or fugue around the fragment: a clever party trick. The term was more often used in military terms meaning to make a good strategic decision when things did not go as planned. In the 20th century, improvisation, when applied to music, implies some sort of 'authentic' spurt of genius that somehow represents the 'real'. This conception of 'genius' is at the aesthetic level of a six year old. Sheer folly.

Anyone can make any sort of music any way they want. My vexation lies in the adoption of the notion of Authenticity in ANYTHING and this certainly includes music and the other arts. Authenticity is itself a false ideology and is often used to support other, and much more destructive false ideologies. (Such notions as Mysticism, Nationalism, etc. are much more harmful to society as a whole than a few poorly dressed jazzbos.) If I cannot make anything else clear in my wasted and wretched life of failure, I would like to make this clear: AUTHENTICITY of any sort is nothing but a bluff to move units. Of anything. Authenticity always means accepting some sort of ideology as 'real' without proper examination. No music is ever authentic in the way the term is used, except perhaps for the sound event of the geese, which is not music at all, unless it is presented as such (for example, in the field recordings of Chris Watson). Art is by definition artificial. There is no difference in authenticity between Britney Spears and Robert Johnson, Bach or Asmus Tietchens. There are differences of course, but 'authenticity level' is not one of them. Authenticity always appeals to some sort of populist impulse, even if it is used in a narrow, highly cultish setting. The intellectual blue jean and workshirt set dreams of servitude. Populism is never more than the ideas and fashions of slaves.

Although the terms 'authenticity' and 'freedom' are often used to describe the same action (a 'freedom' to create a product somehow removed from The Spectacle); this sort of process-based ideology ('freedom' as restriction) is the mirror of other sorts of 'authentic' populisms. To believe that any action is somehow more real when it is unplanned is a completely ridiculous idea. The authentic self is the unexamined self and the unexamined self is what has been pounded into you so long and hard enough by this despicably organized society that you no longer question it. Any limitations on critique, examination, and planning are hindrances to both your artistic and personal development. Whilst the ideology of Free Improvisation can certainly be a very useful experiment in Negation of structures, the authenticity of Free Improvisation is the blind acceptance of a rather doctrinaire and ineffectual approach to problem solving. It is much more of a prison than it is a liberating force. Process-based ideologies can be nothing else. Even useful techniques and strategies should never be mistaken for The Only Way. Only a fool or a dupe would restrict their aesthetic arsenal in the service of an imagined 'authenticity'. Nowadays, most art that is considered 'avant-garde', 'progressive', 'alternative', etc, is based on weak, nostalgia-tinged notions, backed by equally spent, backwards ideologies. I, on the other hand, believe that New Beauty is the last weapon left to oppose The Spectacle. The Spectacle is a very complex and very nefarious system that will require all of our crafty wits to overcome. Despite the odds, I Remain Optimistic. It is hard disciplined work with no pay. Who's with me? ■

"I am not so weak as to submit to the demands of an age when they go against my convictions. I spin a cocoon around myself; let others do the same. I shall leave it to time to show what will come of it: a brilliant butterfly or a maggot." -- Caspar David Friedrich

"I love terrible beauty; I just hate terrible." – Jeffrey Scott Foust

◆THE *PHANTOM* OF LIBERTY◆

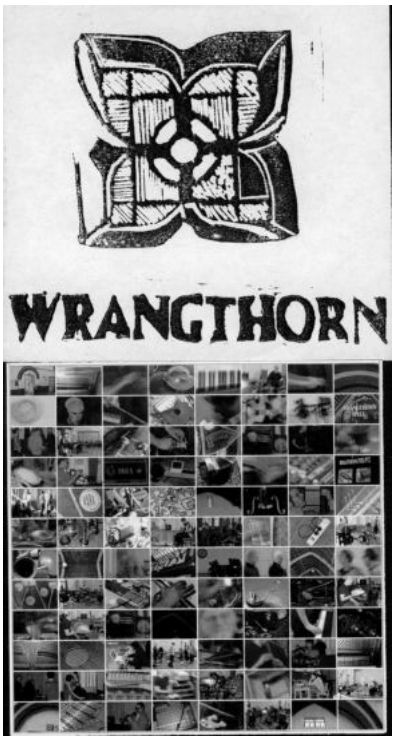
The Inecto School

Wrangthorn

UK NO LABEL NO NUMBER CD (2004)

This year's 'mystery CD' – don't know who sent it to me, or who The Inecto School are, but they appear to be a group of improvisers based in Leeds, whose membership includes Stewart Morgan, and they have been associated with other combos around the Termite Club, including Vibracathedral Orchestra and Ashtray Navigations. What you hear is 13 tracks of excellent collective improvisation / jamming / playing, performed entirely on acoustic instruments. Although documenters like David Toop have yet to put this band in a line with other improvisational achievements from the past, I would suggest that the closest ancestors for Inecto School are The People Band or the Scratch Orchestra, rather than Company. No 'chops' in other words, no jazz influence whatsoever, but strong evidence of a commitment – or even simply an unfulfilled yearning – to try whatever works, to meld sounds together, to work with other human beings in real time.

Instrument-wise, I hear piano, drums, upright bass, acoustic guitars, horns; maybe not that many players in the whole group (no information about this in the package, natch) and perhaps only 3 or 4 people playing at any given time. Their music has an endearing modesty about it, very English, very small scale. The music is not trying to amaze or startle you, and the players are not showing off. Nonetheless some great



instrumental pieces emerge; quiet, odd, idiosyncratic, melancholic, lively. They're not afraid of tunes, which is refreshing - many purist improvisers regard a melody as the enemy. Inecto School will happily let a jam develop into a tune, even if it is a weird one. The long track 'Slow Quillo' could almost be an acoustic out-take from the first Faust LP. (To my surprise, I see Gilles Peterson played this on BBC Radio One, amongst loads of 'urban' music!) Somehow everything is informed by a sense of innocence. So many players you hear these days seem to know all about the history of their chosen field, and they make sure they let you know it. Inecto School somehow arrive relatively free from that baggage. It's very subjective, but I get a kind of old-fashioned, 1970s vibe from listening to this – untainted by the false media version of said decade – which is good.

From information provided, this much we know: the record was recorded at Wrangthorn Hall 14 March 2004; no band members are named, but Tom Peters and Matt Random are thanked. They adopt a crown motif as their device. Included in the package are a set of tiny colour photographs which may document the day's work. A lower profile could not be had. Nifty track titles include 'The Madison Flirt', 'Three Brick Razz', '10 Mute Tanga' and 'Sleight-Spleen-Samba'. Amazingly, the music even lives up to titles like that. They have another LP called *St Vitus Dance*, which I'm currently looking for.

ED PINSENT 14/09/2005

Paper Factory

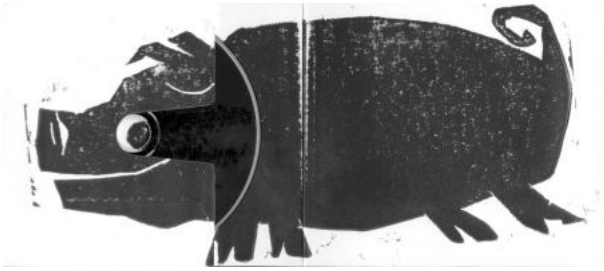
Schlachfest-Session 1

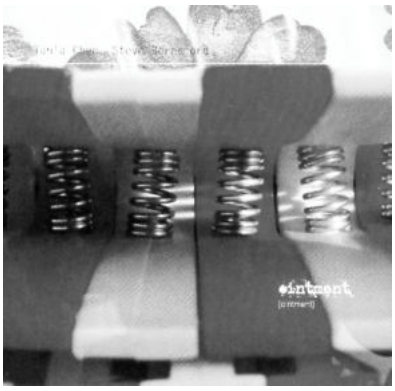
GERMANY KLANGBAD CD (2005)

Didn't think much of this at first spin, but heard on the big stereo it sounds very fine and approached with an open mind, can be a real grower. We have here a diverse combo of European musicians, brought together because they met at a music festival, and they've recorded a clutch of semi-composed, semi-improvised works where they take turns playing solo or in groups. Here's Mike Adcock on the accordion and piano, Clive Bell on the shakuhachi flute, Sylvia Hallett, and Mike Svoboda. And of course Hans-Joachim Irmler of Faust. Irmler's presence is being drummed up as the 'selling point' by label and press release, but of course it's nothing like a Faust record or indeed any of his solo works; it just happens to have been recorded in his studio and he did produce it.

In no particular order, 'Papierfabrik' is one of the four collective works, a quiet but extremely busy 8 minutes' worth – indeed contains a lot of musical activity and pulls itself in unexpected directions. It might be the combination of unusual instruments that makes it work; but there's also strong engagement between the musicians as they twitter, pluck and drone away. This one features some good live electronics work from Hans-Joachim. 'Hinter dem Eisentar' is another group 'jam', and here they start to turn into a real menagerie of barnyard beasts – growls, groans and mournful moans are deployed for this conference of the four-legged ones.

Of the solo cuts, I tend to favour the one by Mike Svoboda where he just goes gradually nuts with his parping horns, but you may also like Clive Bell breathing heavily into his flute. There may be another overdubbed instrument and/or use of studio echo. It's not at all 'minimal'; hardly any of this record is, and it makes a break from the sort of





'twittery' improv that just gets on your nerves. No-one is hogging the limelight either – perhaps the promise of getting your own solo track helps you relax as a musician, drain all that ego out of your system. Perhaps Irmler has had more influence than might at first appear. Even if his own 'Oben Hinten' solo cut, a keyboard-synth-electronic construct, is in a way the most conventional piece on display here. Has a great handmade cover by printmaker Bernhard Maier, depicting a big hog. But as indicated, no musical hogs in the package.

ED PINSENT 20/08/2005
www.klang-records.co.uk

TimOlive / NisikawaBuhnsho

TimOlive / NisikawaBuhnsho
JAPAN GULE DISK Gule001 CD (2004)

A fine 4-track gem from Olive and his new Japanese buddy. Olive is American or Canadian but made his home in Japan, and is developing into a new god of lower-case improv. Some of his scaled-down releases have been extremely demanding, but this one sure does not disappoint. Olive is playing a bass guitar with only one string, Buhnsho wields a broken turntable. The first track, something to do with 'Bunt is my profession', offers a delightful continual whirling effect with lovely added 'crunchy' detail. The 2nd cut is more stuttery, with inert steely trash sounds like little metal splinters, very small in scale, and vomited up from the mouths of trilobites in hesitant gobbets. Yet, despite the lack of loud volume, this release has a more 'frantic' edge than many of Olive's previous projects, which have been quite reflective and static. Somebody slipped a snake into this guy's boot, that's for sure! As he admits in covering letter, this is 'a li'l more overtly rockin' than what I've been up to in the past few years.' The turntable element in particular reminds me of the pioneering work on last season's *Atolon* (credited to Ferran Fages, Ruth Barberán and Alfredo Costa Monteiro), which made devastating use of an 'empty' turntable – that awful dry, rattling sound, so reductionist in intent and severity that it was almost like the death rattle of music itself. Here, perhaps, the aim may be something quite different again; the interplay of the two musicians is best displayed on the long 4th track, which should either send you shrieking to bed with an ice pack on your forehead, or not. It may not deliver much in the way of loud volume, but oh boy is it insistent! Recorded in Osaka in 2003, and first release on this Japanese label.

ED PINSENT 11/07/2005
timolive@yahoo.com
www.d2.dion.ne.jp/~xbun_syo

Tania Chen / Steve Beresford

Ointment
ITALY ROSSBIN RS018 CD (2004)

Proving that play can be a deadly serious thing are two of the UK's better known exponents of new music, Tania Chen and Steve Beresford. Chen is probably better known for her interpretations of piano work by people like Cage and Leyton's own Cornelius Cardew, but proves here that she is no stranger to free-for-all carry on such as this. Beresford hardly needs an introduction, being involved in all kinds of distortions of sonic normality for many years. Here they join together for an album of improvisation, using various 'objects' and 'toys' in a way that must give the well-meaning people at Mothercare nightmares.

They manage to deploy an alarming array of sounds to great effect on an album that moves at a rapid pace, leaving little on the way to grasp onto before the aural landscape dissolves, and one finds oneself in entirely new surroundings altogether. If there was ever rest to be had for the wicked it certainly isn't here. It is extremely difficult to guess just which way the album is going to jump, the duo consistently threatening either total madness, or occasionally, something approaching familiarity. For the most part however they travel an intensely personal path of creation that leaves one pleasantly perplexed.

The last two tracks on the album were recorded live by the ubiquitous Tim Fletcher at the Bohman brothers' favourite haunt, The Bonnington. They make an interesting coda to the album, being somewhat more spacious than the rest of the CD, though the applause of the final track is in a way an unnecessary grounding in the everyday. The causes of these strange emanations are revealed after all that to be items we are in fact familiar with. It would have been better perhaps not to break the spell, but to leave the work to the imagination, investing the album's varied sounds with a mythic, iconic status.

AARON ROBERTSON
Via Gozzano 1, 10098 Rivoli (TO), Italy
rossbin@libero.it
www.rossbin.com

Uncle Woody Sullender

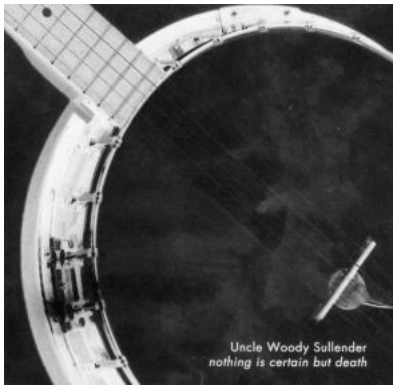
Nothing is Certain but Death
USA DEAD CEO dceo006 CD (2004)

Interesting...an intellectual construct which proposes a kind of melding of traditional Old Timey / Bluegrass music with modernist electronic music. Chicago-based Woody Sullender adopts an appropriate name for said project and brings his banjo into a free improvisatory / art context, with occasional addition of live electronics to great effect. Eugene Chadbourne has done something similar with the banjo in his time, though always with a loopy knowing grin on his face, and was informed mostly by Bluegrass compared to this guy, who seems to have all sorts of other influences.

Laying out his wares on 'Commonwealth Edison', the musician shows straight away what a skilled picker he is; it's spiky music, delivered with many nifty 'choppy' effects on each strum. 'I Am In A Consumption' features guest cello playing from Fred Lonberg-Holm, another noted Chicago improviser; it's brilliantly stark, the crisp recording technique allowing each note to stand out and shine forth. Further effective banjo picking methods emerge; muffled strings, rubbed strings, percussive taps, upstrokes and downstrokes changing tack. By track 3, 'Sallie Goodman Breakdown', things start to get more weird as the live electronics come in. This track is almost all pure noise, but listen closely and the steel strings and melodies can be heard through the feedback – ghosts of old-fashioned dance music feeding in from the past. Great stuff. Track 5 also uses electronics – it's about distorting the normalcy of a familiar sound yet also letting tunes and rhythms leak out, despite the apparent chaos.

As title suggests, there's a generally pessimistic and gloomy 'fixin-to-die' tone hanging over this CD, and many of the chosen titles refer back to Old Timey music – 'Groundhog in the Courtyard' or 'Sallie Goodman Breakdown'. American intellectual Henry Flynt has also reinscribed bluegrass and breakdown music into an minimalist art context, but Uncle Woody Sullender does it through the channel of the solo improvising musician – and quite successfully too. On track 4, you could almost be hearing Derek Bailey on a banjo.

Carol Genetti adds vocals to 'Doute Tôt ou Tard', moaning and wailing in an abstracted way – playing Patty Waters to his Burton Greene. She doesn't sing a conventional song, even if he does play conventional chords; the unusual stop-start dynamics make this another winner. 'The Grain of the String' however, could be the real centrepiece of this record. The overall sound is amplified and distorted; the strings are being skinned alive, and hammered to



death, by his remorseless picking and sliding actions. The recording drops out now and again, adding to the tension. A real slide-guitar death chant, to equal John Fahey. Maybe we need a UK equivalent of this interesting record – perhaps someone to perform improvised music on an instrument associated with our own folk music tradition, such as the hammered dulcimer or accordion. Recorded 2003-2004 at his Chicago home, in the studio, or in NYC; Jason Soliday (live electronics) also guests. A good one.

ED PINSENT 30/07/2005
www.deadceo.com

Trio Sowari
Three Dances
FRANCE POTLATCH P105 CD (2005)

Pretty good stuff from this European trio of improvisers, including the UK's own Phil Durrant. Their name comes from a 1990s CD of same title by Durrant, a man who seems to have completely forsaken his violin to become an electronics guy exclusively. I note he carefully avoids the word 'laptop' in his printed credit; it's all software sampler, synth and treatments as far as he's concerned. Joined here by Swiss Bertrand Denzler, one puffing aardvark he, his claws wrapped around the tenor sax; and the fine percussionist Burkhard Beins, of whose minimal drumming the world just can't get enough. If you were expecting some form of Dance Music from the title, and hoping Beins might be frantically thumping his tubs to rival the 300bpm of whatever latest dancefloor hit, then I suggest you forget those dreams of glory. No high-energy moves from these three guys; the whole record is slow, groaney, and scrapey, and proceeds at same sluggish motion throughout. What sort of dances are we listeners expected to do? Well, just put on a pair of lead boots, slip into your hippopotamus suit, and everything else will fall into place…

The 'Rondo' is a strong opener (in the same way that a bottle of chloroform is a strong opener to an evening out), setting the stage for a conference of ancient giants who appear to be slowly coming to life after 500 years trapped in the ice. Totally unfamiliar and not-normal sounds emerge from the players; can't identify sound source of anything for sure. Sax guy in particular follows in modern tradition of disguising the true nature of his instrument at all costs. Setting scene for CD, 'Rondo' has a certain intensity and interplay between the musicians. Durrant, to his credit, avoids the pitfall of surrounding everything in the usual thick electronic 'soup' that so often dogs this sort of enterprise.

The title 'Bolero' may conjure up nostalgic images of Torvill and Dean for some unfortunates of my generation; in this context, it's more of the same as 'Rondo'. Breathy sax puffs, metallic electronic ringing. A snatch of music box now and again, perhaps from Beins. This is 'asleep' music, a nocturnal portrait of a snoring man, with sketches of his dreams. The long track 'Tumble' isn't much different either; on here, the saxophone purrs like a Chris Watson growling cheetah. Recorded in a studio in France in November 2004; it may actually be one long improvisation sliced into three slabs. Potlatch may have to improve their ideas in the art department if they actually want to sell any of these; the sleeve looks vile. The colours of orange, black and bile-green don't sit well together, and the 'ironic' use of advertising imagery from the 1950s is a major gaffe. That's Potlatch for you; nary a good release in their whole catalogue!

ED PINSENT 10/07/2005
www.potlatch.fr

Derek Bailey / Mick Beck / Paul Hession
Meanwhile, back in Sheffield...
UK DISCUS 21CD CD (2005)

I was excited to check this one out, not having investigated any recent Bailey output for quite a while. It's majorly disappointing though, and probably a less-than-essential addition to the Bailey catalogue. It's certainly good to hear Bailey back on the electric guitar (I gather for a while he eschewed its loud volume and effects in favour of purely acoustic playing), but his performance here is disjointed, dispirited, and every other punch he throws seems to lack force. Supported by Beck on the tenor sax and Hession on drums, Bailey falls back on making the familiar atonal swipes and swabs, flailing away aimlessly on his axe. 'In many parts reflective, but with some spiky bits' is how the label describe Bailey's playing; for me, not enough spikiness in evidence. The trio get briefly spirited on the long track 'After The Red Deer', but for the most part the music isn't really going anyplace or developing very much; just pressing on in neutral. Beck and Hession aren't by any means bad players, but I think I've had my fill of hearing this very English approach to improv, and it just sounds like the usual skittery percussion and twittery sax bleating that they, and many others, have been inflicting on audiences for many years.

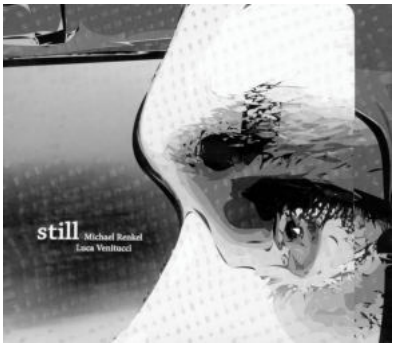
Bailey returned to Sheffield for the first time in ten years in 2004 to record this live set. A return to his Northern roots and to the history of his personal music development. One of the tracks, 'That Sheffield Sound', refers directly to his earliest incarnation of free music, the trio Joseph Holbrooke (with Tony Oxley and Gavin Bryars). But does it really? The titles have clearly been tagged on afterwards, most likely by Discus, and refer mainly to the circumstances of the creation of this rather dreary workout. On day of performance it was raining, a typical British summer, and buckets were deployed to minimise leak damage in the venue; hence the track 'Buckets'. The 'Red Deer' track refers to the pub visited by the weary musicians, to seek balm in alcohol. A very ordinary slice of typical UK improv conducted in typical UK weather. It's increasingly hard, even for me who wants to enjoy and defend this music, to regard it as 'free music' any longer. Still, that shouldn't let us forget what a true innovator Bailey has been. Shame he just sounds so tired here.

ED PINSENT 09/07/2005
ww.discus-music.co.uk

Axel Dörner and Robin Hayward
Axel Dörner and Robin Hayward
GERMANY ABSINTH RECORDS 005 CD (2004)

Yet another exemplary example of New Berlin Reductionism or Reduced Playing, or whatever it's called. Hayward's tuba joins Dörner's trumpet, and they sit down together and issue deep sighs about the sad condition of the world. Plenty of the now-famous 'gas-jet' effect, animal growls, and throaty yawps, all 'amplified' by the bells of their big brass instruments. Also long silences where neither of them can think what to say next. Studio and live recordings from 2001; limited CD inserted in a hand-stitched 7-inch sleeve. The packaging of the stuff from this label is just lovely.

ED PINSENT 19/09/2005
www.absinthRecords.com



Michael Renkel / Luca Venitucci

Still

SLOVENIA L'INNOMABLE 04 CD (2004)

Renkel is the fine Berlin musician who used to do reprocessing and cut-ups of improvised music, his own or that of willing accomplices. He was a real sound-sculptor back then, refreshingly free from preconceived ideas as to where his experiments might lead, or what it was he was sculpting. Nowadays he's more into real-time playing, and doing it very quietly, as evidenced on here and last year's *Two Variations* CD, credited to the group Rebecca. With the help of Luca Venitucci, he realised these three pieces in Berlin in October 2002. Renkel plays stringed instruments, mostly a very quiet acoustic guitar and sometimes a zither with added preparations. Venitucci's methods are opaque, somehow generating odd droning noises and unexpected interpolations from his accordion, his flight-case, and other unusual objects. All the music is extremely delicate and has a flyaway quality, like dragonflies hovering over a meadow near a river; you need to listen pretty hard to catch each dying strain. However the actual playing is not 'reduced improv' or whatever it calls itself these days; it's just that the sound quality of the recording (which is a large feature) is low-key and possessed of a slightly washed-out quality. If you listen again to the interaction of the two fellows, it's interesting to note an uncertain air hanging over the sessions, as though neither of them are quite sure as to how each experiment will develop. There's a respect for silence, and for the instruments, and for each other – all good things which I seem to recall have been characteristics discernible in all of Renkel's catalogue to date. He seems a very genuine chap. The interaction on 'Serraglio' is particularly good, all the gaps and restarts adding up to make it a very 'open' statement, elusive and fascinating.

ED PINSENT 17/07/2005
www.linnomable.com
www.michaelrenkel.de

The George Burt / Raymond Macdonald Quintet with Lol Coxhill and Future Pilot AKA

Hotel Dilettante

FRANCE TEXTILE TC06 CD (2005)

It's a little hard to imagine that this quintet started off life as a folk group doing Fairport Convention and Burt Jansch-like numbers, but that they apparently did. They've come a long way from those home-brew days judging by the sound of this CD though, via some improvisation workshops, to arrive at an approach that consistently hints at jazz yet retains at heart a distinctly group approach. On this album they invite a couple of guests along to join them, Lol Coxhill, likely enough one supposes, and Future Pilot AKA, a little more unlikely you would think though not completely outside the bounds of possibility.

The particular blend of sonic brew that they manage to come up with is pleasing enough, if perhaps a little polite. They do quite a nice line in drifting in and out of catchy rhythms, posbly betraying some of their folk heritage. This is punctuated by improvising that falls, fittingly enough given Coxhill's presence, pretty squarely in the European free camp. For some sort of comparison they manage to invoke to these ears at times some of Ornette Coleman's recent work with Prime Time (whatever you might think of that) or, a little more vaguely, some of Chico Hamilton's groups of the 1950s.

With the heavily impasto-ed blue and white painting that makes up the album's cover it all makes for an outing that has a carefree feel. With possibly the exception of the final track, 'The Hidden Persuaders', it shimmers along like a late summer breeze. It's hard to discern the vitality of the two guests relative contributions, but no doubt that is in keeping with the group approach. Played at volume it won't trouble the froth on your cappuccino, and besides, I always find it a pleasure to hear a group that manages to take the melodica seriously as an instrument.

AARON ROBERTSON
Burt/Macdonald Quintet, PO Box 19526, Falkirk, U.K.
info@textilerecords.com
www.textilerecords.com

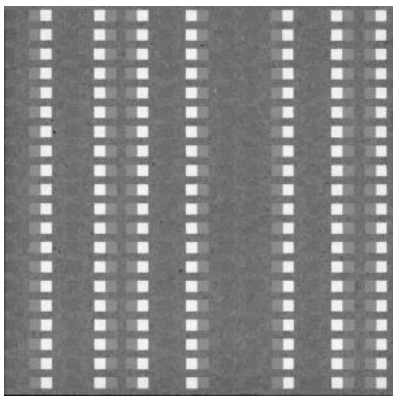
John Hudak / Jason Kahn / Bruce Tovsky

For the Time Being

SWITZERLAND CUT 011 CD (2004)

Pleasant, slow, droning, background music ahoy. Two long live tracks which showcase the many talents of sound artist John Hudak, who rarely ever performs live. On the first one, he does it with the American improviser Jason Kahn, and armed with laptops they perform a live duo at Diapason in NYC recorded March 2003. Kahn had a sound installation there, and sounds from it were woven into the live act; likewise field recordings from Dobbs Ferry, which is near where Hudak lives. It begins with agreeable minimalist noodling through which method they create a cloud of crackly fuzz music, back it up with a gentle drone, add a high-tone repeated in little looping phrases, and throw in other unidentifiable elements of clunking vagueness. Imagine watching two gallery artists slowly covering a 100 foot wall with various shades of grey paint. Gradually (very gradually), the music increases in thickness and body, much like porridge does as you boil it on the stove. But the momentum stays the same throughout, which may be why listening to this sort of music is like watching jelly setting. Without getting any jelly to eat afterwards!

The second track brings us John Hudak again, now playing with Bruce Tovsky. No laptops this time, real instruments instead; they both play guitars, propped up with a fair bit of effects and live processing (all provided by Max MSP software), and they did it at the Roulette Festival in NYC June 2003. Again, subtlety and quietness are the order of the day; the initial foray is one very



thin-sounding guitar pitched against another guitar murmuring out a low-register thrumming sound. Although the work – presumably improvised – starts out uncertain and vague in its shape and direction, it does develop into a riff of sorts – well, let's call it a pleasant minimal guitar figure, almost oriental in its simplicity, framed with ambient droney backing. Like its predecessor, not at all demanding listening, yet it requires a great deal of patience to listen to the whole thing without losing attention.

23/07/2005
www.cut.fm

Martin Siewert / Martin Brandlmayr

Too Beautiful to Burn

USA ERSTWHILE RECORDS 031 CD (2003)

A winning combination of Martin Siewert's

guitar with Martin Brandlmayr's percussion work on these 2003 recordings. Five man-sized gobbets of sound-scaping exercise workouts for your elasticated jaws to chew on, with a rich and complex sound that's aided in no small measure by huge helpings of live electronics from Siewert, while Brandlmayr's vibraphone also adds many pleasing effects. This general sound – amorphous, droney, sleepy, but still compelling - has almost become a strain in modern music which I tend to associate

exclusively with the Erstwhile label, as surely as if it had been trademarked. I mean the sustained, intense and very drawn-out approach to sound production and exploration. (Jon Abbey didn't invent this, but it certainly seems to reflect his predilection for the musicians that swarm like bees to his hive, and the bulk of what gets produced in terms of subsequent musical honeycombs).

This one was recorded in a studio in Vienna, circumstances affording complete control to musicians and producer alike, which results in a fantastically vivid and high-quality sonic product. As has been shown with earlier Erstwhile proven successes (and other similar records), studio technique can improve on the basic improvisation model to arrive at a record that isn't simply a document, but a layered and enjoyable listening experience. With their every movement picked up by sensitive microphones, the musicians are free to get down to the micro-level and concentrate on generating some extremely subtle effects and tone colours; plucked harmonics on the strings, washy and vaguely melodic droning, very effective placement of vibraphone notes and precise percussion punctuations. Plus, there's overdubbing. Each track is a mosaic, built up from the *pointillism* of gentle strokes, taps, brushes and plucks. The instrumentation and playing is spare; it's the thoughtful building-up in layers that produces the lushness.

The sleeve art (by usual in-house designer F Paetzold) seems themed along vaguely maritime lines – close-up images of ocean waves (maybe), seabirds in a flock, gathering storm clouds, and most memorably a ruined Victorian pier. Even the most gifted semiotician is hard-pushed to connect this imagery with the oeuvre's title 'Too beautiful to burn', or indeed make any connection with the highly utilitarian track names, 'Form', 'Source', 'Axis' and 'Hold'. Except for one track which blithely asks 'Is This Love?', a question probably filled with irony in this context. Enjoyable as this amorphous music is, it's hardly concerned with human emotions; more with the exploration of pure form.

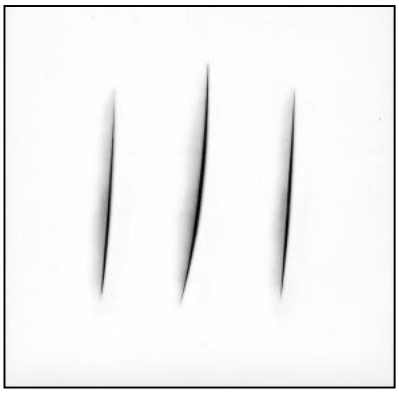
ED PINSENT 09/07/2005
www.erstwhilerecords.com

Tetuzi Akiyama / Günter Müller

Points and Slashes

USA ERSTWHILE RECORDS 044 CD (2005)

40 minutes of good solid improvised buzzing, with additional mad slippery 'guitar' playing from Akiyama, who is doing tape-delayed axe work on this record. He'd do anything rather than record a normal guitar solo! The whole record sounds good, offering the usual fizzy rumbling digital noisy bellows, all



set out in extremely contiguous and continuous lengthy performances. All is mysterious, slow and absorbing, like a large piece of pink blotting paper soaking up the ink of the overworked brain. Let this great combination of sounds calm your fevered brow.

The combination of sounds – Akiyama's treated guitar with Müller's usual gumbo of electronica hash – melds together perfectly and works best when a strong contrast between the two is achieved, then maintained for long moments. Whether Akiyama is doing his 'bendy' note actions or his seemingly-random plucks of the helpless strings, his guitar sounds like it's made out of a side of raw beef and strung up with six-foot elastic bands. If they sold 'axes' like that in Denmark Street, they'd do more business I'm sure. Müller pours forth gallons of the groaning, heavy syrup-styled moanage and wailing as only he can, generating and releasing formidable floods of energy from his tiny digital equipments. 200 chanting monks are locked in his iPod at any one time.

This may not be the most striking or original Erstwhile disc ever, but it is a very strong one, detailed and multi-textured with a good bed of digital compost from which grow many fine flowers. All is abstract, from the minimal cover art integrated with the title and the arbitrary names given to individual tracks, which are represented as / and . marks. The second track is probably the most coherent and compelling (it nearly put me in a trance) and has the catchy title of './/..//.' Inside the cover you'll find a rather silly image of a Les Paul guitar with a Samurai sword laid across it. Did the Japanese musician endorse this rather crass idea? It's like something from a 1975 Be-Bop Deluxe LP!

ED PINSENT 20/08/2005
www.erstwhilerecords.com

Girlfriends

Geert

U.S.A. BETA-LACTUM RING RECORDS MT018 CD (2002)

Geert is a Dutch name descended from the rather more Germanic Gerhard, and unbeknownst to me, famous for being one of the most difficult of European names to pronounce correctly. It is rumoured that few people who are not Dutch can do so, although they might well say that having voted no to the European constitution so they can preserve their 'Dutchness'. The album's press release gives an unfortunately graphic take on the attempt to say it properly, which in a magazine of such refinement as this there is no need to repeat. Needless to say, this two guitars, bass and drums improvising outfit from Nijmegen probably aren't the sort who are content with taking things easy.

The holy name of Can is invoked in comparison, and early on it's easy to hear why. The band certainly starts in a krautrock-like manner, all tightly coiled aggression, before veering off into some spacious atmospherics that bring to mind a very youthful Sonic Youth in places. This effectively sets the tone of this short-but-strangely-compelling CD: noisy, improvised rhythmic periods alternate with lyrical, even delicate, free textures. I do keep expecting either Damo or Kim to come in at some point, but it alas it never happens. What the album lacks in diversity is made up for in part by its brevity, giving the music a hard, gem-like quality.

The continued existence of the band remains unclear. It appears that one of the members, Erik Drost has since gone on to join the ranks of the long-running Legendary Pink Dots, also now based in Nijmegen, whose own website worryingly refers to the Girlfriends in a past tense. No other material by the band seems forthcoming in any case. It would be a shame if this were true, because this is a great start to what may have been (and may still be for all I know) a long and prosperous career in what is somewhat unfortunately classified across the land as 'post-rock'.

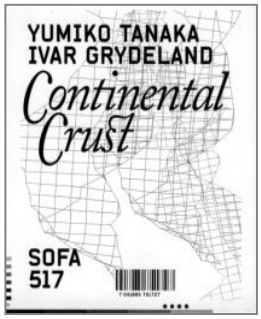
AARON ROBERTSON
P.O. Box 6715, Portland, OR 97228, USA
blrr@blrrecords.com
www.blrrecords.com

Yumiko Tanaka / Ivar Grydeland

Continental Crust

NORWAY SOFA 517 CD (2005)

Quite good record by an acoustic improvising duo who do the quiet, droney and plucky scrapey thing for five cuts.



Yumiko Tanaka plays the shamisen, the Taisho-Goto, and adds her vocal stylings; Ivar Grydeland plays acoustic guitar. Not incompetent work; a reasonable way to occupy 46 minutes. Recorded in Osaka in 2004. According to the European half of the act, the music made him think of plate tectonics. It's some way from an earthquake, Ivar, but the point is taken.

ED PINSENT 20/08/2005
www.sofamusic.no

Vic Rawlings and Mike Bullock

Fall Of Song
USA CHLOË RECORDINGS CHLOË004 CD (2003)

Also known, in this house at least, as 'Fall Asleep'. A duo of players, Vic Rawlings and Mike Bullock, turn in a dreary set of performances using live electronics and interaction of same with cello and contrabasse. A couple of USA nobodies trying to imitate the 'Onkyo' approach – and not really doing very well at it. Bhob Rainey, who's also turned to playing 'reduced' improv, did the mastering. It's all a bit uncertain. They switch between the scrapey approach with high-pitched electric whines and grumbling bass mutterings. You can hear that both players are delivering a tight, controlled performance – almost to the point of constipation. The subdued waves of feedback are practically squeezed out between firmly clenched teeth. This may have had something to do with the circumstances of recording this disc, which took place 'in an antique wooden gymnasium in winter, where it was so cold we couldn't feel our hands,' they tell us, shivering at the memory.

I like the way their acoustic instruments are integrated so tightly with live electronic systems; the cello was amplified and Rawlings had alongside it a homemade rack of electronics made of old circuit boards and speaker cones. Bullock was also amplified and equipped with a tone generator. But somehow their performances fail to lift off. They have a precious and painstaking attitude to their art, which works against them – not enough chaos or passion in the work. I'll admit there is a certain precision in the sounds generated and selected, yet the finished pieces end up formless and directionless. And their slow progress means they take an age to get nowhere, which is so often the case in reduced improv these days. And also with London Buses, I might add. Cover photograph equally arty and pretentious – a photograph of a car full of rusty old pipes. All this probably says something very deep about the corruption and decay of modern music, so perhaps the *Fall of Song* is equated to the Fall of Icarus, or something. See also Mike Bullock's solo CD, which is marginally more engaging.

ED PINSENT 09/07/2005
www.chloechloe.cc

Office Products

Nude Media
USA TOAST AND JAM RECORDINGS t&j 017 CDR (2005)

Another goodie on the American micro-label Toast and Jam – they may only be releasing CDRs now, but brother, watch their dust in years to come! Doug Theriault and David Chandler are both from Portland, Oregon; they have an interesting brand of electronic-based improv, doing everything in real time using synths, LiSA software (as also favoured by the UK's Kaffe Matthews), guitar and electronic percussion. They resist showing off any instrumental prowess (maybe they have none), and they ain't averse to sampling a few records, to add to the fun. This release is a 'culmination' of their experiments and performances from the years 2000-2004.

This record isn't quite as 'fierce' as last season's *Destroy All Improv* (on which Theriault played with Ed Chang), but it remains packed with ideas; the duo can't squeeze everything they want to say into their allotted time, and they keep shifting around restlessly. They can't sit still. These are playful doodles and squiggles played in real time, making a record of spontaneous, edgy, fun. There's some fine 'scrawled' guitar work on track 6 and track 2, so spidery you could use it as a fishing net. And track 3 is such a deranged example of how to use mechanical beats, that I wish all club music were realised in such an imaginative style, but then nobody would ever want to go to nightclubs ever again.

The restless push-pull switcheroo style of this duo means you won't get bored for a moment. The only thing that might possibly put you off is the rather 'plastic' sound of everything, but this may be intentional, and may result from their chosen media for this studio outing. They do like adding cut-ups from records, and have performed with People Like Us and Negativland, who do similar things, but Office Products aren't as interested as these forebears in (a) content, (b) wackiness or (c) subverting the media, despite what their title *Nude Media* may suggest. Their work is far more abstract. Admittedly track 5, for a few moments, comes close to Negativland turf; I think it may be a send-up of *Star Wars*. But the voices sampled have no ironic hidden meanings, and are soon so severely mangled by studio technique as to be completely unrecognisable, becoming just another abstract element in the general glorpy mix. (I think the voices of the musicians themselves are similarly treated elsewhere; a bit of rehearsal banter is captured through the distorting device). In fine, the duo create a startling 'surface' at all times. Recommended.

ED PINSENT 25/07/2005
www.tandjrec.com

Doug Theriault

Interface USA
TOAST AND JAM RECORDINGS t&j 018 CDR (2005)

Of the two on Toast and Jam this season, this one is less compelling. Perhaps because it's a solo record, and Doug doesn't have anyone or anything to push against, and consequently finds it a tad too easy top wallow in his self-made sty of noise and randomness. That said, his sounds are good and quite unusual. He improvised all 12 tracks using a 'sensor guitar', a device by which he also controls his live electronics set-up. There may be a bit too much process going down, which saps the force behind his guitar punches. A lot of chattering, meandering and droning adds to the overall sketchy quality of this one. Recorded in a studio in 2003. Bring in a sparring partner next time, Doug!

ED PINSENT 22/08/2005
www.tandjrec.com

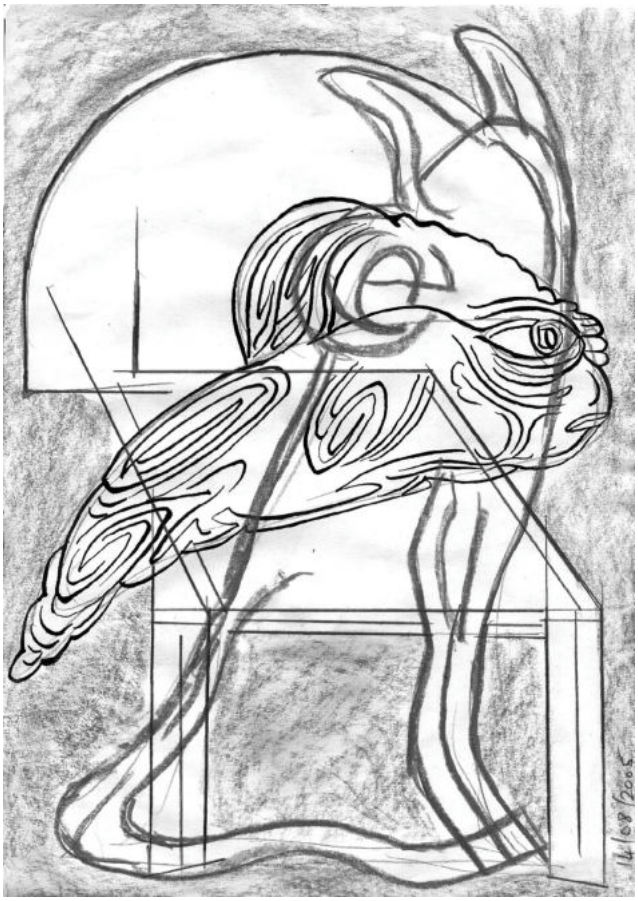
Johannes Frisch / Ralf Wehowsky

Tränende Würger
THE NETHERLANDS KORM PLASTICS KP3021 CD (ND)

Some exceptionally turgid, shapeless and flabby improvisations by our hero Ralf Wehowsky, joined by the bass player Johannes Firsch. RLW plays the harmonium, guitar, oud, sitar and live electronica, and also edited and transformed the improvisations in his studio. Four cuts of dreary noise is the result. Painful to listen to, extremely unpleasant sounds, and what appears to be a completely random cut-up arrangement. I love RLW's work normally, but I don't know what went wrong here. I wouldn't give this to the cat!

ED PINSENT 24/08/2005

ERSTLIVE improv



Keith Rowe / Burkhard Beins

Keith Rowe / Burkhard Beins

USA ERSTWHILE RECORDS ERSTLIVE 001 CD (2004)

First release ErstLive001! Blasting off a new series of live CDs! Jon Abbey released a massive document from his own Amplify 02 Festival as a box set (reviewed last ish); now, as a parallel strategy, here come small and manageable slivers from the Amplify 04 Festival, this time released as (mostly) half-length CDs in slimline jewel cases. Each in series has identical sleeve, though printed in variant colours, all showing the same image of a row of empty chairs. Is this some oblique comment on the audience? Or a post-modern image which elliptically demonstrates that music is not really heard until there's someone sitting there to hear it? (Believe me, nobody stands up to listen to this music!) And what are we to make of the series of photographs shown in the box set ErstLive 005 (see below), which seem to imply that the setting up and dismantling of the musicians' set-up is every bit as important as the playing itself? One year ago, no-one could have answered these questions. But Amplify 04 has changed all that.

This release is 28 minutes of guitar, electronics and percussion, recorded live in Berlin at a club. Keith Rowe is, natch, on guitar and radio, Burkhard Beins on bashy objects. What a great name combination – it reminds us that our lives don't amount to a *row of beans*! Whereas the lives (and take-home pay) of these musicians certainly amount to a lot more than that, and here they come roaring out to prove it. Actually this record starts out purring like a kitty-cat, but it ends up roaring like an entire pride of lions. Some consumers might feel they've had their fill of Rowe's samey slow-moving improvisations lately, but this one does have a lot more import, volume, and sheer sexy throbbing presence than a lot of other releases on the racks. The rest of the ErstLive series may be an unknown quantity, but this one's impolite raucousness is something of a change after last season's ultra-ultra minimal crop from this label. On the strength of his work here, I'd say Rowe is about ready to play a tour with Sunn O))) (and he'd look great in a cowl too!).

Beins the percussionist is probably in here somewhere too. What you can hear of his work, when it's not being elbowed aside by the massive ego of Rowe, seems pretty good. Around 07:00 – 08:00 this CD starts getting into some seriously unpleasant squawls – like silk sheets being ripped apart by disgruntled haberdashers, simply for your listening pleasure. After that the CD never lets up! By end of evening's entertainment, two pop songs which simply happened to wander in from the live radio set-up are slaughtered like innocent bystanders, after which massacre Rowe stands glaring at audience like a serial killer drenched in a pool of feedback fuzz. To him, pop music has always been the enemy, since at least 1964 onwards. Rowe in violent mood – always good listening value. What a corker!

ED PINSENT 12/07/2005

Keith Rowe / Toshimaru Nakamura / Thomas Lehn / Marcus Schmickler

Keith Rowe / Toshimaru Nakamura / Thomas Lehn / Marcus Schmickler

USA ERSTWHILE RECORDS ERSTLIVE 002 CD (2004)

This one's a single 38-minute piece, performed by Rowe, Toshi, Thomas Lehn and Marcus Schmickler; all electronics / feedback / computers / synth, and the table-top guitar of Rowe. Quiet and static for the most part, there's little to say about this one; it's a massive exercise in tremendous restraint. This is something of a feat when it comes to these four larger-than-life personalities, who normally get into boisterous arguments over everything from the real meaning of Wittgenstein's works, to paying a restaurant bill. Settling their differences, they get down to brass tacks here. On the basic 'canvas' of low-key feedback and quiet amplifier hum, the four artistes add tiny brushstrokes of colour, texture and volume – synth drones, noisy crackles, shortwave radio fragments, clanging guitar swipes, abstracted throbs and thin, bodiless whines. Imagine a block of clear resin about the size of the Pompidou Centre, with tiny red and yellow painted seashells suspended in it. Pretty ornamental you might think! But there's a lot more than decorative embellishment going on here. The musicians interact perfectly, to the extent that none of them wishes to disturb the mood or contribute any sort of obtrusive, inappropriate statement to the general consensus that constitutes their thoughtful, reasoned dialogue. Control, dynamics and detail – all operating at micro-level. Pretty much stays in one place over the whole length, although it's not a bad place to stay in.

ED PINSENT 16/07/2005

Christian Fennesz / Sachiko M / Otomo Yoshihide / Peter Rehberg

Christian Fennesz / Sachiko M / Otomo Yoshihide / Peter Rehberg
USA ERSTWHILE RECORDS ERSTLIVE 004 CD (2005)

Fennesz and Rehberg from Mego match wits with Otomo and Sachiko M; 23 minutes of electronica result, played on two laptops, turntable and sinewaves. A pretty dismal release it is too, amazingly, in spite of these four major players. The photograph inside shows the four, set up in the by-now familiar 'conference' position, where the players face each other in a huddle and have their backs to the audience, who are surrounding them as though in a boxing ring. This is another ultra-minimal record. You can hear the rotating metal turntable, vague rumbling effects, the odd click and crackle disturbing the placid surface. Such modulations and variations in sound as are taking place are incredibly subtle and almost imperceptible, yet somehow the piece advances along somewhere, somehow. After about nine minutes, things start to liven up somewhat as the Viennese duo – who appear to have politely held themselves in check up to this point – bend things their way, by issuing noisy buffets and shocks a-plenty. Otomo speeds up his turntable revolutions in sympathy.

This is music that invites concentration from listener, otherwise it might appear fairly boring and worthless. It never fails to sound gorgeous, on the surface. But somehow it appears more than a little random in the way the sonic elements are trotted out; there isn't much interaction in evidence between the players, and it's more as though each artiste is just displaying their familiar tricks and gimmicks without listening to the others enough. Which is what old-school improv used to do, but with acoustic instruments. Bit of a wet firework in all, low on energy, low on dynamics.

ED PINSENT 24/07/2005

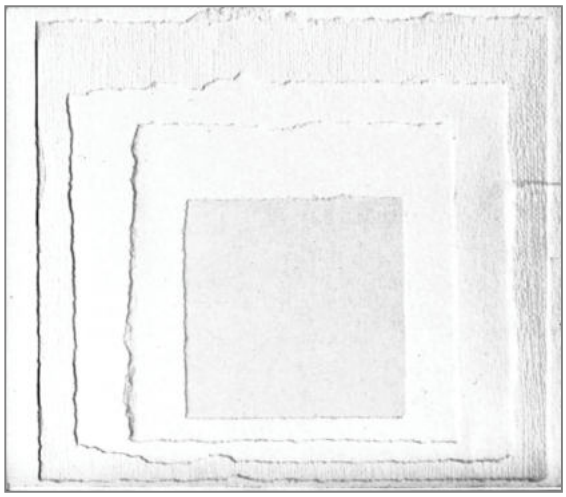
Keith Rowe / Sachiko M / Toshimaru Nakamura / Otomo Yoshide

Keith Rowe / Sachiko M / Toshimaru Nakamura / Otomo Yoshide
USA ERSTWHILE RECORDS ERSTLIVE 005 3 x CD (2005)

Daunting 3 CD set of music continues the ErstLive series bringing total to eight discs so far...the previous Erstwhile box set is already starting to seem quite picayune, compared with the thorough documentation of this particular musical event! This box records one single entire concert, about 4 hours long, performed by those four prolific and ubiquitous musicians – Rowe, Sachiko M, Toshi and Otomo. If you bought *Amplify 02* and still require more of the same, here it be...It's undefinable, opaque music. Impossible to say how it works; there's no earthly reason why something so 'empty' should be even halfway interesting, yet you'll sit there riveted throughout. Or maybe you'll float around in the anti-grav zone it creates. In the sleeve notes, Rowe tries to account for it by composing strings of associative words. Otomo is just plain surprised when he hears the whole thing played back to him; he honestly can't remember doing any of it! Francis Bacon was a painter who, reportedly, saw much value in 'daydreaming' – at least, what those in 'normal' society would regard as unproductive, time-wasting, free-associative thinking, drifting off. It was an important part of the creative process for him. He arrived at his best work that way.

I don't mean all the players were asleep at the wheel; in fact the quartet are listening all the time, perhaps doing more listening than playing. Quiet and respectfully polite is their method of working together, ever-attentive to tiny details and subtle shifts in mood. Control, concentration, and rigidly-focused energy is the key – no splurging, no histrionics, no action painting, no angst-filled passion. The sustained, long-form continuity of the music is impressive. It generates a continual rumbling, with slow and inert textures of white-noise type elements, such as buzz, crackle, swish, hum, rumble, thrummm, mmmm. The second disc contains some slightly noisier materials, such as rattles, roars, loops, radio voices, but all embedded into the strata of deeply-layered droneage.

Making a performance this long, doing it without a net, then releasing the whole thing – that alone is a bold step. A lot of improvised records prefer to give you the edited highlights, taken from lengthier sessions; this one has zero edits, just index points on the discs to guide you in. It's already starting to appear like an expedition, an exploration made by four travellers together. All improvised, yet why does it feel like nothing is left to chance? These four have become almost 'experts' at this way of playing, this sort of souped-up Onkyo mode. It's so 'open' that you can always see all the available options that are there. For all its density, the



music is made on a very transparent structure; and it proceeds on a linear track. Quite monolithic in scale, but linear. Then again, maybe it's wrong to look for conventional development; maybe the development all goes upwards, like a big column of dense smoke from a chimney. Diffuse, open architecture, slow drifting.

There's a memorable text from Toshimaru in disc 2. Called upon to provide a sleeve note, he simply reprints an extract from his diary. He spends more space describing his cooking, laundry and phone calls than he does logging the performance of this 4-hour concert. How Zen! If you think the subtext is that it's more fun doing your own laundry than making (or hearing) music like this, maybe you're right. Toshi sums it up in a way. He's very aware of the passing of time, and how dull it can be having to endure long stretches in your life where nothing happens. Maybe this music is existentialist in like manner; it does pass on a heightened awareness of passing time...every second is made to count. I played the set over three continuous days, but I must find time to hear it in one sitting – it could be spellbinding. The final disc is yet more non-eventful, where the musical engagement has been stripped down to basic feedback, sporadic string crackle, and amplifier hum. Metal and electricity; very elemental and very spartan. The endplay of disc 3, somewhere after index point 3, is about the most gorgeous music you could hope for. Arrives in a splendid slipcase design featuring white abstract squares, which is Rowe's homage to Josef Albers.

ED PINSENT 22-24/08/2005
www.erstwhilerecords.com

MARTIN ARCHER
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SSSHHH ...
QUIET MUSIC + NOTHING MUSIC

Taku Sugimoto
Principia Sugimatica
FRANCE A BRUIT SECRET 11 CD (2005)

Here are seven new (2004) studio recordings/compositions from good old Taku, he who is known in Mexico as Mil Mascara (the man of a thousand masks), on account of his ever-changing stylistic approaches. I certainly can't keep up – his career seems to have been one of constantly refining and reducing his music, to make it ever more minimal. Last time I looked, he was an important contributor to the *Amplify 02* box set, where he fervently expressed his hope that Onkyo music and all its related offshoots would finally be put into its coffin, so that everyone could move on to new areas of exploration. Before that, he was leading informal workshops that revisited and reinforced the old idea that improvisation should be seen as a form of instant composition. Ideally, a composition that had his name on it. And what now?

The jury's still out on what exactly this is, but it could be a rarefied and distilled form of systems music. The titles are impenetrable streams of numbers and may indicate the presence of a mathematical or geometric grid structure underpinning each composition. The timed duration of each finished piece is very precise – exactly 5, 10, 6, 6, 9, 1, and 13 minutes, numbers which may have some 'pure' quality to a mathematician, or even some magical significance to a numerologist. Whatever the duration, each piece is mostly silent; there's just one single note or a couple of notes, repeated and spaced out along a line to form some sort of pattern. 99% not-playing; the playing that does take place is carefully planned. You can see already how this might appeal to Taku's rigourous 'less is more' mentality. Indeed it could be that each piece is actually composed of samples, repeated as needed. Maybe the work was put together in the studio using a computer, based only on 5 minutes' worth of actual playing.

This may be a good intellectual exercise for nudniks like me to write about. To listen to as music? Tedious and pointless. In fact it redefines the meaning of those words. Maybe if you could use your 'memory' as a listener to compress everything on this record together, squeezing out all the silent gaps, then it might amount to a perfect musical statement. Maybe! Admittedly, there is some discernible development in this experiment; by track 4, we actually hear a guitar note resonating. Up to that point they've been edited, and very severely clipped. In presenting the listener with the least possible information, it's as though he wants you to 'really' hear each note. I seem to recall Stockhausen put himself through a similar 'starvation' exercise. He didn't listen to records or play his piano for a week or a month. When he reached the end of this forced deprivation period, he sat down and played one note on his piano. You can imagine the results. The next thing you know, he composed the *Klavierstücke* pieces.

It's also interesting to note how the title of this work, *Principia Sugimatica*, seems to inscribe Taku's name into some sort of statement that implies that he has invented, or discovered, a new fundamental rule of geometry or algebra. His work may be diminishing into pure minimalism, but his ego sure ain't! Decide for yourself if he's the next Newton. This could be one of the last releases on A Bruit Secret, as label boss says he's had enough. Is it fitting, or a terrible shame, that the final statement will be something as empty as this?

ED PINSENT 30/08/2005
www.abruitsecret.com

Francisco López
Live in San Francisco
USA 23FIVE 007 CD (2005)

Here's a brace of live recordings by this Spanish darling of the avant-festival circuit, one from 2000 and one from 2001. Funny how I used to rave about this guy's recordings. I think things took another turn after I went to one of his performances at the ICA. It was pretty good, but there was something about it I didn't really trust. Partly it was the wearing of the blindfold, about which more below. I used to place some credence in López's avant-garde credentials, convincing myself that long-form recordings of near-silence or complete silence might in some be equivalent to blank-canvas oil paintings of the 1970s. Which I love. But is that a true equation? Your blank-canvas artists weren't just out to draw attention to themselves; their work was executed with a conceptual rigour and sometimes even contained a spiritual depth, neither of which qualities I can really find in López. He simply makes soothing, unchallenging sounds. Could be he's stepped into the box marked 'radical experimenter' a bit too easily. But then, why just pick on him – there are lots of other chancers who have done the same thing.

These two recordings aren't bad to listen to. At least I haven't encountered any long silent gaps between the music, which seem to be an obstacle on so many of his other discs. They were so infuriating. You're working hard enough and putting your ears into overdrive simply to hear what he's doing, then he sees fit to withhold it altogether…that said, we're no better off listening to this than to any other generic Brand-X vaguely droning electronica. The second track is likewise all continual sounding, though much quieter – gives the impression of very ominous heavy breathing, strong on creating an atmosphere, gas cannisters slowly leaking.

Ironically, the sleeve notes try and persuade us that the original performances confounded the expectations of the audience, who'd inherited this picture of the 'silent Spaniard', only to be drawn into an overwhelming vortex of intensive noise and ever-changing variety. They emerged filled with wide-eyed enthusiasm and praise for the man. This release, in short, is intended to add weight to the 'López Rocks!' theory. Admittedly, he has made another record that's composed of samples from heavy metal records, but so what? I'd rather just listen to heavy metal records.

CD arrives packaged completely in black, with matching slipcase, and a free blindfold included inside. This is one of the main bones of contention I have with López. It's not even a suggestion, it's a requirement on his part that we subdue the use of one sense in order to enhance another, and thus 'fully appreciate' his great musical work. This again is where, for me, he parts company from genuine conceptual artists, who are more concerned about asking questions and opening up new avenues of enquiry and exploration; they produce work that can be appreciated on many levels. López is the opposite; he would rather close those avenues down, and lead his audience off in a certain single direction, which is something art should never do.

ED PINSENT 13/07/2005
www.23five.org

+minus
A Rainy Koran Verse (UK live)
GERMANY TRENTE OISEAUX TOC043 CD (2004)

This enigmatic name conceals three hale and hearty fellows, instantly recognisable and notable for their exploits in the 'reduced' and 'quiet' improvisation playing modules. German artiste Bernhard Günter, the ringleader, has assured his position as the 'King of Silence' since about the mid-1990s, with not a few perplexing and compelling releases of quiet shuffling noises, making himself into a form of Reverso-Merzbow superhero. Graham Halliwell and Mark Wastell hold up the banner for the UK wing on this outing. You recall they released an exceptionally quiet recording called *Faktura* in 2002. I know I'll never forget it.

Halliwell quietly extracts spoonfuls of whiney feedback from his alto saxophone, by means unknown to man. Wastell, the UK's foremost pioneer and practitioner in the reduced method, is on percussion duties and includes prayer bowls, snare drum and bell in his toolbelt. Together, the trio produce three tracks of very intensive sustained and peaceful meditational droning, scraping and humming. They did it in live concerts in the UK during 2004. And it's all grand stuff too. Though it's also very solemn. The long duration of the works is a necessary feature, essential perhaps if the musicians are to make their point effectively. You're required to sit still and contemplate the minuscule alterations in sound. I know I didn't.

With the occasional chiming effect courtesy of Wastell and his little bowls, the listener could almost be transported to a Temple in Asia. But then, look at the title; the Koran is the holy text of Islam, not Buddhism. Oh well. It certainly is 'rainy' music, and could be happily used to contemplate another wet English summer. As for the verse - the poetry, such as it is, of this release lies in the fact that it happened at all. A rare event, the rare conjoining of three such like-minded lovers of quiet music, particularly with the inclusion of Günter. I usually get fed up pretty quickly with this kind of low-key precious quiet stuff, but Günter brings depth to it somehow. Infinity, timeless spaces, somehow quite mystical and maybe even vaguely religious – which is a form of love that dare not speak its name in today's aggressively secular environment. This speculation is neither confirmed nor denied by the title.

ED PINSENT 09/07/2005
www.trenteoiseaux.com

Behrens / Heyduck
Plastic Metal
GREECE ANTIFROST afro2030-31 2 x CD (2005)

A fine double-disc set of very intelligent and extremely minimal sound-sculpting, of which the first disc is a certifiable killer. The more I hear from German Marc Behrens, the more there seems to be to get excited about; even when I can't recall exactly what his records from years ago sound like, they somehow never fail to leave a deep impression. Fellow countryman Nikolaus Heyduck is another sound artist and they've been doing collaborative concerts since 2000. The 'Plastic' disc was all sourced from various pieces of plastic, that horrific 20th century substance that's a by-product of oil (that has caused so much blood to be spilled), and was never intended to be used as creator of musical sounds. Indeed when crumbled, torn or rustled it generates noises so totally inert that you see practically see Behrens' little face light up with glee, facing the challenge of how to make something interesting from such a potentially hostile material. It's true that I've heard many lesser men (well, not that many) using bubble-wrap, close-miked and fed through a mixing desk, as a species of musical instrument…and fail miserably.

Conversely, these two German boffins succeed admirably, laying into the task with a fierce determination. Every last iota of potential is wrung from plastic bags and chocolate bar wrappers, in this form of sonic recycling that does much for the environment (it even combats the spread of noise pollution). Admittedly, vast truckloads of equipment are required – strong microphones, powerful amplification, and much computer post-processing, reverb and other FX to beef up what might start out as something quite small and thin. But the translation into music is immediate and seamless; I can remember it already as glorious music, and when not music it still has a palpable, living texture so distinct you can almost taste it. It takes a special talent to elevate the commonplace into such high art. Behrens and Heyduck achieve it by hard work and craft – not by ironic or silly gestures, like playing barcodes as music, or wiring up vegetables (and both of those are genuine examples of 'novelty' avant records).

The 'Metal' disc isn't perhaps quite as strikingly brilliant at first listen, but still hugely worthwhile. Maybe metal has been overused as a material in this field. Even so our explorers come up with a reflective and, at times, threatening sound. The recording is based on metal drumkits; later, they were clearing up Behrens' basement together, when they found lots of metal junk that inspired them to add additional layers. Actually, it wasn't junk at all – it was two steel drumkits which had been left to rust in the corner since 1991! The very protracted sound-scapes (this disc is much longer than Plastic) become progressively weirder and more alien as they subtly work their changings, virtually effacing all human traces from the finished work. In terms of sheer precision and intelligence applied to electro-acoustic work, we have something that's a worthy successor to the IRCAM school. Plastic and metal – never leave home without them.

ED PINSENT 21/07/2005
www.antifrost.gr

Ronnie Sundin
Hägring
GREECE ANTIFROST afro2028 CD (2004)

Most recent release from this Swedish loner, interviewed in issue 13. Might be fair to say Sundin has something of a problem settling on his musical direction; as Bad Kharma, he started out ultra-noisy, then as rsundin became ultra-quiet for a long time. He's now thinking of swinging the pendulum back the other way, so perhaps *Hägring* will turn out to be the last statement released in the 'quiet' mode. It's a pretty good one too; eschewing digital index points, Sundin requires that we absorb the entire 55 minutes in one sitting, and he rewards the patient listener at the end with a lengthy melodic and dream-like drone. Like fresh cream on strawberries.

Hägring easily meets the Sundin standards for opacity and bizarreness. Unidentifiable, hyper-processed sounds that might be field recordings or simple treated white noise, are what it chiefly comprises. Sounds are used in a fairly bewildering and illogical collage to form blankets of 'pure' textures. Each micro-episode bleeds into the next, punctuated by gaps of total silence, giving you a breathing space to reflect on what you may or may not have heard. Strange rustlings, whistlings, murmurations and highly attenuated droning effects all build up to create a light wind of sonic weather passing through your mind for an hour. Not an ambient cliché in sight, but then not much else in sight either!

This release comes perhaps the closest to replicating the sleep-walking or dreaming on the edge of sleep effect that is one of Sundin's preoccupations, and is intended as a final part to a trilogy on this theme that includes 2001's *Sleepwalk* and 2002's *Morphei*. His familiar trick to replicate this semi-dream-state is to continually 'pull the plug' at the exact point when the listener is starting to be pulled into a gently rumbling episode of sound. He stops it dead, with a tiny crackle, and leaves you pretty much stranded in some in-between state, until the next sounds floats gently in. Also, as noted with his other work, he effectively achieves the construction of a totally imaginary world, sealed off from everything else, with not a trace of external reality to burst the bubble. After the lamentable *Standards*, this absurdist classic puts him back in solid with me.

ED PINSENT 10/07/2005
www.antifrost.gr

Keith Berry
The Ear That Was Sold To A Fish
USA CROUTON crou028 CD (2005)

One of two newish releases by this droning London-based minimal fellow. Sadly this one's a bit on the dull side; seems to comprise no more than a series of very forgettable, and very similar, short ambient pieces, made from slow and vague synth-generated scapes. The ambient sections sounds clichéd already, and it's not a very old work. The only small saving grace is the addition of some extremely subtle sound effects, so low in the mix as to be almost indiscernible, but vaguely suggestive of something watery (perhaps subliminally). Indeed, the intention seems to be to evoke the experience of 'closing one's eyes while floating gently down a nighttime river'. Perhaps some tracks also allude to episodes in the life of said fish, and when interpreted in this way it does convey a fine sense of peace and loneliness, as though exploring a marine world or a deserted island, all alone. Not much more than that though. Berry is no lightweight; he's immersed himself in Zen, Sufi poetry, Oriental and Western philosophy, and even the I Ching. He's trying hard to find a way to work these intellectual profundities into the hard drive of his Apple Mac, and create blocks of electronic sound that function like zen koans, in such ways as to 'unlock the mechanisms inside one's mind that lead to enlightenment.' Despite this, I still feel there may be a problem with dearth of content, and not enough going on musically or intellectually to fully engage you. However, I intend to prove myself wrong on this account, and will continue to listen to Berry's work. Arrives packaged in a box with tea leaves.

ED PINSENT 20/08/2005
www.croutonmusic.com

Keith Berry
Buddha's Mile
UK AUTHORISED VERSION AV018 CD (2004)

A lot better than said tea-leaf record, this one is 35 minutes of quiet field recordings, minimal music, and very gentle distant clanking sounds. Succeeds in creating an aura of mystery where the other CD doesn't quite manage it. Extremely delicate and subtle sound work, a very odd voyage in time and space, whose context and meaning is extremely elusive, nostalgic, and full of poignancy. Reminiscent of misty mountains, cool air, and old silent films. Another fish-themed recording (there's a fish on the cover at least). Again, it can sometimes veer towards dull Ambient moaning, but not so badly as to break the powerful spell it casts. Aye, Brian Eno has become the Stockhausen of modern electronica, in the sense that some people just focus on one thing he did; in this case, probably 'Through Hollow Lands' from the *Before and After Science* LP. Vague impressions of floating on the see in a boat (perhaps the same as Berry's own *Golden Boat*), of birdsong in a forest...a pleasant pastoral dream, quite beautiful.

ED PINSENT 22/08/2005
www.a-version.co.uk

EKG
No Sign
USA SEDIMENTAL sedcd041 CD (2005)

Quite nice variant on the now-familiar 'minimal improv' approach, executed with care and precision by a couple of nimble horn players utilising live analogue electronics to modulate their respective voices. Kyle Bruckmann, the famed US player, is here on oboe and English horn; Ernst Karel is new to me, and he plays the trumpet. These pieces, built out of sessions recorded in Chicago and San Francisco, may appear somewhat 'blank' to begin with, but listen closely and you can discern there's a good deal of constrained energy and even a little warmth, swimming below the layers of ice. All you need to do is chip away with your ice axe to release these wriggling axolotls and Moray eels. Alien-ish sounds emanate from this disc, all the better for having begun their life as human breath fed through acoustic metal instruments, and not generated exclusively in the hard drive of a laptop. Apart from that, there's not much more to this release than these lengthy tracts of slow, breathing music, that gives the impression it's being squeezed lovingly out of a big white electronically-modulated polythene bag, like so much confectioner's icing, by our two fat chefs here. For fans of nmperign, Axel Dörner, Stephane Rives, Bossetti, Greg Kelley, and other like-minded wielders of the quiet horn.

ED PINSENT 24/07/2005
www.sedimental.com
http://ekg.klingt.org

gdg
Things I found to be True
USA SEDIMENTAL sedcd040 CD (2005)

Boston improvising 'legend' David Gross performed these solo alto sax works, recorded in NYC during 2002-2003 in the 'natural' manner. What I mean by that it was recorded by Scott Smallwood (who usually does ambitious and unusual field recordings), and he's sensible enough not to interfere in the work with studio processing or effects. All raw natural sound for you... Gross does the 'sucking and gulping' thing with his sax, likewise the 'heavy breathing through a metal tube' thing, and thereby joins the elite community of those who disguise the natural sound of their wind instruments to an extreme degree – see EKG review above for list. Also on occasion you can hear the very keys of Gross's instrument clicking open and shut in a semi-musical way. Taking quiet improv to new and exciting zones...

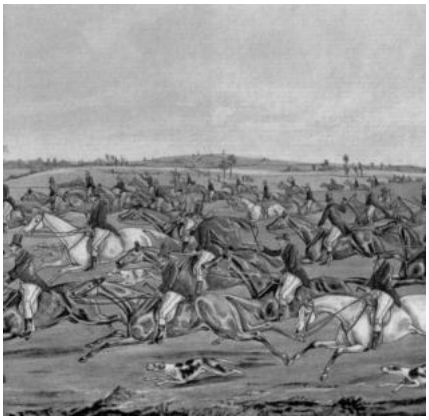
The early cuts on this disc are more about exploring (or inventing?) his process, and can come over as a little inert – soothing at the best of times, but otherwise more like someone eating a bowl of spaghetti than playing an instrument. But then we heard 'Carnival of Souls', a track where he allows some real notes to appear in all the fingering and breathing noises. It livens up...he turns into a very breathy gasperoo sort of guy. Then on 'Dystonia', he contributes his own muffled wailing forced through the tubes and the bell of his sax, sounding like a wounded animal drowning in a swamp. Anguished cries as of a growling bear, in full stereo too! These later tracks redeem all. I'm now quite prepared to believe his claim that he used to be a 'powerful' free jazz blower and has distilled 15 years of experience into this current work, which he admits is 'Eurocentric'. Nice record. The cover is a tasteful painting of a younger David Gross and his brother, executed by their mum; indicates the 'personal and revealing' dimension to this work.

ED PINSENT 21/08/2005
www.sedimental.com
www.gdgsite.com

TAPE▣MASCHINES▣MAKEN

Martin Archer
Heritage and Ringtones
UK DISCUS 18CD CD (2004)

Excellent release from this diehard artiste living in Sheffield, something of an overlooked genius who can't seem to get his fair share of the 'juice' in today's avant-music world. Maybe he's unwilling to play the schmoozing game that seems to be required price of admission to the upper echelons of the festival circuit; if so, good for him. This one's been around for a little while, sadly arrived a little too late to be included in issue 13. The splendid music is illuminated by extensive notes from Archer included in the press release; he's a craftsman who likes to tell us how much work went into these pieces. This is mostly a solo electronics record (in a way) in the vein of some of his beautiful 1990s releases, like *Ghost Lily Cascade*; though he also plays saxes, the violectronic, and other instruments, and there are not a few collaborators, either appearing live or as samples. Editing is important too; there's a lot of what he calls 'improvedits', by which I understand him to mean he takes an intuitive approach to this mechanical process.



The 'heritage' side of the project concerns Archer performing versions of songs by, or tributes to, some of his musical heroes from the past – in this case Duke Ellington, Bert Jansch and Anne Briggs. The 'ringtones' are four lengthy electronic and sampling compositions (one of which is quite magnificent). This part of the project reveals a testy and exasperated side to this world-weary musician, who clearly feels that so much great music of the past is in severe danger of being forgotten or swept away, in the frantic search for novelty that characterises today's market. Or perhaps because we all have such short attention spans now. In a slightly bitter tone of resignation, Archer declares that the commercial production of ringtones for mobile phones is the 'only real growth area' left in music. Anyone taking a look about them in the UK in 2005 can't help but shrug their shoulders in agreement; mobile phones, high street shops and kebabs seem to be all we have left. Archer's sarcastic response is to compose his ringtones so that they last over nine minutes; if actually used on mobile phones, they wouldn't allow a call to get through. Which is probably the whole idea; anti-commercial hoaxes delivered with a faintly sarcastic barb.

The ringtone works were recorded during 2003-2004; Archer's collaborators include the harpist Rhodri Davies, Simon H Fell, visiting percussionist Ingar Zach, Tim Cole who provides some lovely acoustic guitar on 'Ringtone 2', and Chris Meloche who appears in sampled form. Overall these are all a lot busier than some of his recent works (even including the spoof Japanese progressive rock record), and the 'improvedit' method delivers interesting and exciting results, much like Simon Fell in his glory days, giving the listener too much to cope with at once. Archer seems to be revelling in manic glee, informed by a dose of above bitterness, bringing a hang-it-all quality which leads him to the cusp of musical mayhem (although his essential Englishness and politeness rein him in). His sax playing is showcased to advantage on 'It don't bother me' and 'Where's Mike?', where his simple clean tone shines through, even when plastered with electronic and percussion malarkey at every turn.

Tracks 8-11 on this CD comprise a single long work, about 22 minutes in four parts, a tribute to the folk singer Anne Briggs and according to Archer 'the best piece I have made to date'. Certainly it's very strong, and on at least two main levels. Compositionally, it uses violectronic improvisations, voice recordings, layers of other compositions from this same CD, and lots of editing; the voices come from Archer, his female alter ego Masayo Asahara, and the excellent Julie Cole. The voices melt into each other, warping in and out of distorted dimensions, producing an extremely distinctive musical taste; at times, quite haunting. Thematically, it's his personal update on the lyric 'Let No Man Steal Your Thyme', which in Briggs' world was a warning to young maidens to protect their virginity from the inevitable hordes of invasive, rapacious and greedy males. Archer's variant is to substitute 'time' for 'thyme', making yet another comment on contemporary Western society, equally invasive with the million and one pointless distractions and amusements it forces upon us, all of which of course amount to no more than banal, futile, timewasting trivia. Archer exhorts us to resist this process with our dying breath.

Despite one or two clunkers (the tribute to prog-rock legends Magma misfires badly), this is one of Archer's more successful and worthwhile releases, created with great intelligence and craftsmanship in editing and composition. Also it sounds absolutely fantastic; a strong, loud hi-fi resolution is its hallmark. An ambitious electro-acoustic (mostly) work filled with variety, textures and plenty of meanings and resonances for you to decode.

ED PINSENT 10/07/2005
www.discus-music.co.uk

Andrey Kiritchenko
True Delusion
UKRAINE NEXSOUND ns30 / JAPAN SPEKK KK006 CD (2005)

Smashing solo work by Kiritchenko, the founder of this Nexsound label which dogs my life so much (The Moglass release, and the *Psychogeography* compilation, are both recommended). Ukrainian Kiritchenko has made a name for himself in his home country at least, known for his diverse and open-minded approach to experimentation. This record presumably represents but one aspect of his many-pronged endeavours.

It's to do with the acoustic guitar, and the harmonic overtones you can get out of said instrument – especially when you pluck it, as AK does, as though you were handling hot coals with a pair of iron tongs. He started doing it in 2004. Whatever it was he was doing, ten months later he still hadn't finished; the experiment gained momentum. He started rearranging his tapes into compositions, did some breathing exercises and somehow brought them into play as well, and then expanded the starting 'concept' (admittedly a very simple one) to include a piano. Clearly things got a little out of control. It reads as though he didn't really know what the outcome of his experiments would be, which is commendable – why experiment otherwise?

Although the artefact I currently hold in my claws is a CD, it's clearly structured as an LP of two halves, with the guitar music on side one. The guitar is strummed, solemnly and heavily as in some ritual, producing the required overtones; but the finished recording is nowhere near as stark as that, and is layered with afterthoughts, additions and emendations. Foreign elements, including spacey field recordings, drones, echoes. Papers shuffled around in his study; his children at the kitchen table, asking questions. We hear the actual sounds of things being recorded honestly, but also evidence of many interesting post-production treatments; this could be a strong minimalist statement, developing over time into a maximalist one.

By the time we get to part two, the piano half of the album, the musical component is getting a little more 'tasteful' compared to the roughness of the preceding tracks. However the same mysterious transformative methods have been applied. The sounds are mutated cleverly and the piano produces a strangely nostalgic feeling. Words in the track titles refer to illusion, perception, good and evil; while the printed booklet arrives with a preposterous drawing which has been cut up and collaged, with odd fragmented philosophical quotes scattered around. Very deep…or maybe it's all part of the game that Kiritchenko is playing. The sonic experiment seems to be governed by game-like rules, which were adapted and expanded as needed. Kiritchenko has also performed as Critikal, Sidhartha, Nex, and done radio and TV performances. An intriguing oddity which I recommend.

ED PINSENT 10/07/2005
www.nexsound.org

Victor Nubla
Empúries
SPAIN HRÖNIR GMHLOOJ CD (2004)

His other project to be received this season is this solo CD, recorded in 2002, at the Contemporary Art Museum of Barcelona. Empúries is I gather simply the name of a village in Spain, presumably one where Nubla had a nice holiday with a good bottle of Spanish wine and a fresh fish meal. He decided no doubt to commemorate his experience in sound, but ended up producing (instead of the expected pastoral portrait of serenity and bliss) the present mish-mash of wonderful urban noise. He did it using only a portable recording device, and entirely in his hotel room in Girona! We hear sampled and distorted voices, along with a jumble of other recordings that might be field recordings, or might be samples taken from any given hotel TV set. Everything is held together by a 'spine' of a slow guitar figure loop. It's absolutely fascinating. I was riveted here for 35 minutes and no reason why you should not be also. Different methods are involved but it would appeal to listeners who also like Philip Jeck. This is one very busy record, yet it's not chaotic, rather a good drifting mix of strange tastes, like the smells and sounds of varieties of seabirds, marine life and oil pollution that your nose and ears might encounter on any given maritime voyage on the brine.

Indeed, this contemporary 'snapshot' of the magical world as it is today does arrive decked out in a maritime themed cover, a naval tugboat or perhaps commercial vessel sailing on the ocean wave, said vessel bearing the name 'AMAZE', which is perhaps appropriate assuming you're into decoding the semiology of CD covers. This recording does indeed 'charm' the listener more than 'amaze', but it's still a well-constructed and intriguing statement. Mad radio broadcasts in a layered jumble perhaps. Let it flow! Repeated phrases, when they appear, build up a strange rhythmical music. Monk-like chanting sounds form themselves into loops. Once close ancestor (for me at any rate) is a very obscure CD by very obscure French loons DDAA, which I doubt anyone else has even heard, but it does exist. This DDAA record simply went on like forever, with murky samples and weird beats lulling you into an unearthly trance. *Empúries* by contrast does some similar things, but it also gets pretty manic. About one-third of way through you get this drumming sound added which increases its intensity. Quite delirious...well-organised chaotic noise explorations. An episodic pattern, changing tack every three of four minutes without a single break in the sound flow, allowing things to get hairy and out of control in the best possible way. Be sure to look for other releases in the MCO series by this fellow, including *Neige* (a 2002 solo concert), *About Breathing* (with Robin Storey) and *Tao Point* (with Tibetan Red) – all available on the Hrönir label.

ED PINSENT 24/07/2005
www.hronir.org

Vernon and Burns
The Tune the Old Cow Died Of
GERMANY GAGARIN RECORDS GR2012 VINYL LP (2005)

With its modernistic abstract sleeve design that looks like a computer printer malfunctioning, this one certainly comes across as a bit of an oddity, but turns out to be a good example of well-crafted tape-work and sound art. Vernon and Burns are a team based in Glasgow, and both of them have been involved in radio work. (Also it seems they perform as Boy Band Tax Returns, whatever sort of project that may be). Here they use spliced tapes, documentary recordings, found materials and allsorts, and quietly assemble a very charming and beguiling set of pieces.

What really gives them the edge over so many records of this ilk is that V&B have a great sense of humour and fun. This record shows it is possible to work in the cut-up mode without needing to resort to obscene jokes or infantile frat-boy humour. Since I've heard so many records recently spewed forth from the USA shock-jock mentality of Broken Penis Orchestra and others of a similar adolescent mentality, it's extremely refreshing to find something so much more subtle and informed by a dry wit. Vernon and Burns are not trying to be 'shocking' or 'ironic', even when they use childrens' records or old educational tapes from forgotten sources. They have some great sounds, strong ideas about juxtaposition, and use them in a very winning way. At times, it may come across as the work of two BBC staffers having a bit of fun with tapes from the radio archive, but then perhaps that's very close to what it is. Their unassuming stance grows on you, keeps you listening. While not setting themselves up as 'proper' experimenters along the order of Luc Ferrari or Bernard Parmegiani, this duo can often be more bold or daring than any establishment electro-acoustic musician.

ED PINSENT 18/09/2005

Greg Kelley
I don't want to live forever
USA LITTLE ENJOYER LE1 / GAMEBOY RECORDS GB73 CD (2005)

Another extremely 'perplexing' release. Greg K is someone we normally associate with quiet improv and free jazz, but this record could be an assemblage of tapes rather than a document of an improvised performance. Kelley is credited with 'trumpet and spring drum'; no reference is made to his tape-editing skills. But what we actually hear is mostly (a) hand-held cassette recordings of an odd quiet noise like someone repairing a lawnmower in the back yard, and (b) noisy mechanical metal music of some sort. The two basic building blocks of sound alternate in a semi-structured sequence, interspersed with silent gaps. After a time, you can tell the (a) and (b) pieces are loops, or portions of the same recordings

repeated; and the idea of using silent segments he may have borrowed from Francisco Lopez. These are some of the same characteristics you find in Structural-Materialist films of the 1970s; those film-makers used film loops relentlessly, over and over, until they were certain you could tell they *were* loops. Then they went on doing it, until you were begging for mercy. And Peter Gidal at one stage was preoccupied with using black leader segments, to project a black screen at regular intervals in between short bursts of imagery.

On Kelley's record, at about 11:00 you get some processed droning sound that might be Kelley playing his trumpet, but if so it's clearly filtered and may even be re-recorded...I'm making tentative stabs in the dark to account for this extremely peculiar record. I don't know that it's processed droning – maybe this is how a trumpet sounds when played from the inside of a spring drum. What the heck is a spring drum, anyway? This droning occupies most of the central region of the record, which then ends with a return to the cassette loops, and further bizarre snippets of processed noise. Curious!

The record purports to have been recorded by Kelley on his recent tour with Mike Bullock, and makes manifest his interest in the work of Harry Pussy, AMM and MEV, and Walter Marchetti. Certainly there's some of the same warped sense of Fluxus humour that Marchetti exhibits on any of his 'absurdist' releases on the Cramps or Alga Marghen labels. To add to the sense of absurdity, there's even a sleeve note by everyone's *bête noire* of conceptual art, Leif Elggren. The touching snapshot of old relatives on the cover and title indicate that this is a meditation on the mortality of mankind. An editing-suite construct of combining electro-acoustic techniques with improvisation. Very good.

ED PINSENT 27/08/2005

Charlie Charlie

Presents 'La Respiration des Saintes'

AUSTRALIA ANTBOY MUSIC ANTBOY 06 3" CD (2005)

A lovely and quite ingenious fragment of clever sound art. This is a single 13-minute composition, and it's another heaped-up jumble of random odd field recordings and all manner of stuff. With all the voices and shifting acoustical timbres flying around so wildly, it quickly creates the effect of a long walk through an urban space – a space of quite impossible dimensions. There's a lot of whirring, jangling cutlery-type noises, spoken word (in French) from radio sets, and even things like gas jets and breathing recordings – the title is *Respiration Des Saintes*, so that fits. Charlie Charlie are allegedly a duo of sound artists, unless this is simply Will Guthrie larking around under a guise, and they did this using Walkmans, dictaphones and radio sets and 'cheap concrete sound', whatever that may be, as a source. Everything was then edited in the studio. They purport to seek out a 'gritty and dirty' flavour to their materials, and clearly are also fond of repetition of certain texts and voices. It's not really as dirty as they think, but it's highly fascinating – not shocking or chaotic, the effects that many people in this area go for when they realise to their delight they can clash two opposing sound elements together. Instead, reality is gently jumbled and shaken in a cocktail mixer, and poured out into a tall frosted glass for you to enjoy.

ED PINSENT 27/08/2005
www.antboymusic.com

Will Guthrie

Spear

AUSTRALIA ANTBOY MUSIC NO NUMBER CDR (2005)

A nice short 'blat' of electro-acoustic studio composition and rugged sound-sculpting by Guthrie, the Australian percussionist and droning improviser. As part of a pre-planned 'recycling' programme, he takes a bunch of sounds recorded in London, uses them in a live situation in Italy, then chops everything up in France. In short, with this action he virtually recreates all the important steps in the life of a medieval cloth merchant in 14th century Europe; that's certainly how it feels to me. Also very apt that he did the chopping actions in France – no-one can match those guys when it comes to Steak Haché!

Guthrie, who undertook this project with the words 'Paris or Bust' stencilled onto his forehead, claims he wanted to use both music and noise in equal portions, to 'sculpt a piece that makes sense compositionally'. Well, they all say that, Bill! Luckily, he also acknowledges it's an absurdist assemblage. It sure is pretty indescribable – a lot of metal, thunder, heavy drones, buffets from a cruel wind, howls, screeches and gurgling. The inept way that it's all pasted together adds to my theory that Guthrie is also Charlie Charlie, but it does make listening to this an exhilarating experience – a rough ride in the tumbrel cart, a lopsided rumble over very bumpy terrain. In only eight minutes too! Great stuff!

ED PINSENT 04/09/2005
www.antboymusic.com

Iovae

Four-Track Magnetic Tape Arrangements

GERMANY ZAREK 08 CD (2004)

Five short works for magnetic tape composition, of interest due to the striking variety of weird sources used by composer Iovae to attain his nefarious ends. For the first one, he dragged bits of junk around his home using stout ropes, producing an interminable clattery racket, and also played collections of old glass bottles, hammering away in animated fashion, for added percussive effects. His neighbours immediately registered a complaint, but he couldn't hear – he was busy editing the sounds to produce an interesting ascending and descending 'swooping' structure, which is what you will hear. Very economical and imaginative use of limited materials. It ends with violence, as he shoots the wine bottles with his air rifle, thus further alarming neighbours with evil sounds of shattering glass.

His second foray exhibits slightly more conventional electronic jiggery-pokery, in the well-known 'vintage' mode favoured by analogue devotees, and uses oscillating tone-generators with added reverb. With its steady, devilish drone, it depicts a sinister plane ride though bumpy weather, perhaps referring to the episode when he made good with his wings to escape from irate neighbours. The threat of assassination is lurking at every corner. Compellingly, this track seems to have a 'snarling' random melody buried deep in one channel. Paying tribute to his hero Xenakis, Iovae admits to using 'stochastic' processing on some of these recordings. I think this means some form of scientific random principle, but I can't recall.

Track 3 is a drum machine fed through oscillators. It's cleverly manipulated to avoid any sort of regular rhythm pattern at all costs. The treated surface of the sound softens the stridency of those digital beats. The fourth cut uses solar radio emissions, and Morse code; edging into Disinformation territory here. Quite dramatic and awe-inspiring, this is the most narrative of his works, suggesting dire emergency – time to bail out and reach for the lifebelts. The fifth work closes the chapter on the story of his vengeful neighbours; he clearly opted to dispose of them in the most efficient manner possible, utilising the bullet. It's the sound of machine-gun fire recorded at Fort Knox, that well-known American institute of public executions. Due to layering of recordings, this one sounds like a bank of gigantic typewriters, relentlessly composing an official message of doom.

Iovae is Ron Orovitz from Cincinnati, and has been a sound artists since 1988, starting with tapework and turntables, later cultivating an interest

in using scientific instruments to make sounds. What strange tales are contained in this short disc of his. It may turn out to be nothing more than an avant-garde novelty record, but today it feels like 30 minutes of good clean abstract fun, executed and realised with a lot of style and ingenuity, particularly in the editing. Ignaz Schick produced, and it originally came out as a CDR on Drone Disco. By Jove, it's lovae, they all cried on its release.

ED PINSENT 19/07/2005
www.zangimusic.de

Koji Asano
Sanctuary on Reclaimed Land
SPAIN SOLSTICE 036 CD (2005)

One of Asano's more interesting solo experiments of late. I have sometimes wondered why every single idea he has ends up being strung out to occupy a full-length CD, but this occasion certainly warrants it. Commissioned for an exhibition in Osaka Red Brick Warehouse (Sound Art Lab 2004), *Sanctuary* is a studio construct, evolving into a large-scale sound piece so huge it's easily capable of occupying that Warehouse all by itself. It starts with a piano playing, sound of which is slightly muffled by background noise – perhaps a contrived electronic 'wind and fizz' effect. It evolves and develops, very gradually; it's clearly a lot more layered than some of his ultra-minimal works of a few years back. The piano hammering is almost like a ghostly version of Charlemagne Palestine's *Strumming Music*, but with absolutely no corporeality to the sound. Everything is suspended in a light digital mistiness.

The music, along with the title, starts to suggest some form of life struggling to make good in desperate circumstances. A ramshackle church built on waste ground, or a shelter on scorched earth after nuclear devastation. I've often thought (especially from his bleak photography) that Asano finds great beauty in urban desolation. The music continues; after ten minutes it becomes even more soft-focus, smudged and undefined; you'll think you're dreaming the music. Follow it through to the end and you'll find he achieves a deep and ethereal beauty, intense yet transparent layers of sound shifting around in the air, like sheets of coloured cellophane. An amazing, disembodied, large-scale construct in sound. Sanctuary is successfully claimed.

ED PINSENT 30/07/2005
www.kojiasano.com

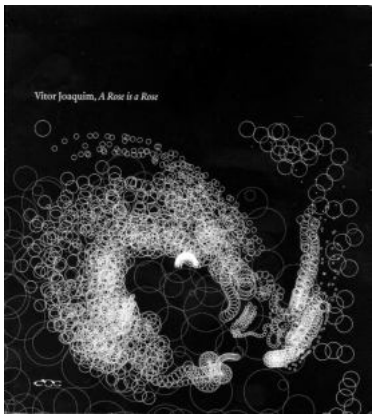
Lionel Marchetti
Dans La Montagne (Ki Ken Tai)
USA CHLOË RECORDINGS CHLOË003 3" CD (2003)

Awesome work from this magisterial sound-composer. An electro-acoustic widescreen panorama in sound, depicting in only 12 minutes a nightmarish mountain range where only doom awaits the hapless climbers, who are all apparently falling to their deaths. We hear unbearable sounds of screaming men and women, ropes cracking and

whirring as they fly free of their pitons, rocks creaking, and the howling of hideous cold winds buffeting the helpless bodies of those poor leather-booted fools impertinent enough to defy the Olympian gods. Indeed, towards the end, we seem to hear the mountain itself issuing deep groans of contempt and melancholy as its whole body shakes.

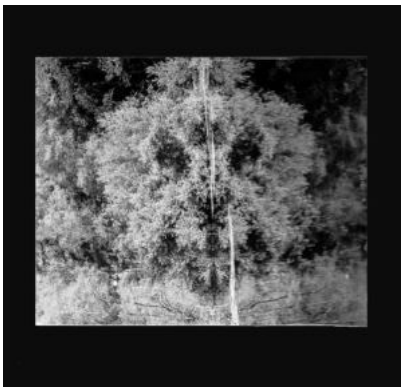
I've since been massively disappointed to learn that the sounds actually derive from Kendo, the Japanese art of swordplay, and the screaming men are actually Kendo students with bamboo rods. Totally unrelated to mountaineering sounds then, but I think my sonic fantasy still holds good; this is one reason why you should never read press releases, or indeed learn the facts about anything. Facts just get in the way of imagination. Bruno Roche helped Lionel Marchetti to realise this one; the two of them often go mountaineering, roped together like two bush-babies wearing their Leslie West t-shirts and listening to 'Nantucket Sleighride' on their iPods…recorded in 1996, released in 2003 on this odd Canadian label with cover art featuring an appropriate detail from a Pieter Bruegel painting. A deep-focus sound portrait, packed with dramatic and alarming detail.

ED PINSENT 11/07/2005
www.chloechloe.cc



Vitor Joaquim
A Rose is a Rose
AUSTRIA dOc recordings 007 CD (2004)

A nice construct, probably one with no life outside the computer, but of interest…mostly sets of rattling and churning loops of some description, with added layers of garbled voices thrown on top. The music was all improvised and then assembled in the studio to form an 'organic whole'. The voices are 'sound bits form random TV sounds'; the avowed aim may be something to do with remaking trivial media culture into some sort of mildly philosophical statement, musing on the debris that constitutes modern life. This may sound unappealing, but the CD has a slightly darker edge than the average dollop of electronica garbage, and is all the better for being so monotonous and single-minded. I like the way it trundles on and on like an ill-tempered, grumbling fellow…eight tracks, all untitled, wrapped in a tasteful purple 'greeting card' style CD wallet, and a design comprised of



many little circles resembling bubbles. A release on an Austrian label suggesting that the Vienna scene is outgrowing the shadow of Mego and Rhiz and the laddish club-based insistence on electro power-noise. Joaquim is no upstart though, being a 'key player' in the Portugal electro-acoustic scene and having been improvising musically since 1982 and making a career creating music for dance, theatre, cinema, video, installations and multimedia, and whatnot. Thankfully he does not see fit to flood the world with his product; his earliest available release comes from 1997, and this is only his 4th CD.

ED PINSENT 13/07/2005
http://doc.test/at
http://joaquim.emf.org

Elektronavn
Rationale Mystique
DENMARK SELF-RELEASED NO NUMBER CDR (2004)

Elektronavn
A l'inexistant centre d'un espace sans forme / Audela l'inconnu
DENMARK SELF-RELEASED NO NUMBER 2 x CDR (2005)

Couple of CDR sets from this Dane were sent in; Magnus Olsen Majmon is his name, *Rationale Mystique* is pretty good. Majmon seems to be a youngish chap and chooses to operate somewhere 'between hybrid, electronics and acoustics', wherever that is. He manages to deliver a good intriguing mix of field recordings, sound effects, recorded voices and ambient drones. He has a very strong narrative sense which I like, music that tells stories; and with his shifting dynamics and unexpected turns, he keeps the stories exciting and compelling. This CDR has 5 cuts in about 34 minutes; his stuff is for sale via website, not in shops.

Elektronavn seems to have metaphysical and mystical depths which not many in his field (not many people, period) aspire to. His first cut is built around, or incorporates at its centre, an intoning voice that immediately brings a sense of ceremony, of something religious. It's juxtaposed with traffic sound, minimal music and planes flying; now there's striking for you! Second track is no less narrative; could almost be an avant-movie in sound. There's musical snatches, airport sound effects, clipped voices. The theme is suspenseful, a mystery movie. Subtle but effective combinations. This guy has a fine ear for discerning and displaying natural rhythms, and getting them to overlap in intriguing patterns.

There are temple bells, flutes, woodwinds and water sounds on track three, all hinting at strange ceremonies; and the fifth track is a remix of a musical performance, featuring four of his friends on trombone, guitar, bass and drums. But the fourth track is the best one; further mystery voice loops, traversing strange zones of noise, awe-filled drones and windy spaces. Samples of a church choir singing in the distance; I love this kind of music that makes imaginary landscapes so vivid you can almost walk inside them yourself. If he's using computers or digital technology to do this, it's well concealed – smoothness of layering and editing, intuitive working methods may account for it. The craft doesn't get in the way of the stories he wants to tell.

Majmon reminds me (slightly) of Edward Ruchalski, whose music I discovered last ish to my continuing joy, but only in the way he combines tapework with music so imaginatively; otherwise he's pretty much his own man. This record may not make your head revolve through 90 degrees, but it has great charm, craft, originality and mystique.

A l'inexistant centre d'un espace sans forme / Audela l'inconnu is a home-made release of two CDRs in a nice black plastic DVD case, through which is barely visible the image of an oriental decorated statuette. This music is somewhat more ambitious in intent. It's two suites, both based on his understandings of the work of Samuel Beckett; but where Beckett usually offers us little more than emptiness and bleak futility, Elektronavn is full of joy and hopefulness. The area where they intersect may be the notion of absurdity; but where for Beckett, it was the result of much bitter brooding, in Elektronavn's hands, it becomes a healthier excuse for play.

The first suite, 'A l'inexistant centre d'un espace sans forme', contains some superb cut-up works. The first two tracks are very strong; lots of voice loops, other handfuls of noise, ingeniously selected and assembled into many layers. There may be some old 78s of 'ethnic' world music in here (I think I hear the Pekinese Opera), also combined very carefully into the overall mixture. The jumble of sounds builds up into a transparent fog – voices from the past and the present, musical singing and chanting speech, various percussion effects, drum loops, and lots more. Unlike a lot of sampledelica freaks, Majmon has a sensitive ear for combinations, and also totally honest and very convincing, and derives much power from the dynamic arrangement of elements.

Further old records appear on the fourth part of this suite, in another layered and shifting collage; part three is rather more conventional electronica dribble, but the fifth and closing part if very ambitious. Much more like 'old school' musique concrète, lots of post-processing treatments and soft-pedalling the narrative elements, all of which makes it positively delirious. A sumptuous feast of sonics closes this excellent first suite.

The second suite is quite different. It's a process work, based on the staging of an event. He asked three musician friends to perform an improvisation in a railway tunnel, took recordings, and then stitched and wove them all together in his computer. Accordingly, the three musicians – an opera singer, a guitarist and a hurdy-gurdy player – appear first in their own 'section', then gradually combined in a dramatic climax. This isn't as coherent as disc one, but still interesting for the ways in which the quality of the performances was affected by the situation. The opera singer sounds lost; the guitar player sounds lonely and afraid. Gosh, it must have been hell in there! As the combination of sounds kicks in, we even get to hear some railway sounds – hopefully, the locomotives were passing overhead and not running over our three friends. The music takes a while to gell, but eventually this composition delivers pounding chimes of doom.

ED PINSENT 24/08/2005, 04/09/2005
magnusolsen@webspeed.dk
www.123hjemmeside.dk/elektronavn

Free 103 Point 9 RADIO

This independent NYC radio station sent me another huge parcel of recordings – they must have noticed we wrote about their work briefly in TSP 12th. Besides broadcasting a lot, they also release a lot, that's for sure! Some of the main men involved on these Audio Dispatch releases include the all-round good guys **Tom Roe**, **Matt Bua**, and **Matt Mikas**, whose work is generally very inventive and very creditable indeed; now they're joined on certain projects by the ubiquitous **Scanner** (Robin Rimbaud) from the UK.

Along with the package of goodies comes a very revealing thick photocopied book called *Wave Guide*, wherein their oppositional and critical stance is nicely articulated in a range of essays, interviews and reference materials. This station is becoming more than just a centre for good music and creative energy; they certainly see their work and their very presence as a challenge to the broadcasting monopolies. The book tells you in great detail what is wrong with commercial or state-owned radio stations, and broadcasting regulation policy in the USA. It's not all politics though, as the diverse collection of broadcasting strategies and musical approaches below should persuade you.

EP 02-03/10/2005

Crossed Circuits (AD027) is ten examples of sound art from a cross-platform media exhibition at Hogar Collection. Extremely drifty and snow-scape styled noises to get lost inside – vast spaces of urban desolation are the order of the day. Includes Ben Owen, Michelle Nagai, 31 Down, Tianne Kennedy and more.

The Dust Dive are a Brooklyn band from Flatbush Avenue. *Asleep or Awake Walk* (AD022) provides 12 examples of their singer-songwriting craft; Laura Ortman, Ken Switzer and Bryan Zimmerman adopt the disguise of 'urban hillbillies' to provide song-portraits of parking lots and main streets. Too contrived for me, but file alongside the thin end of the Americana wedge.

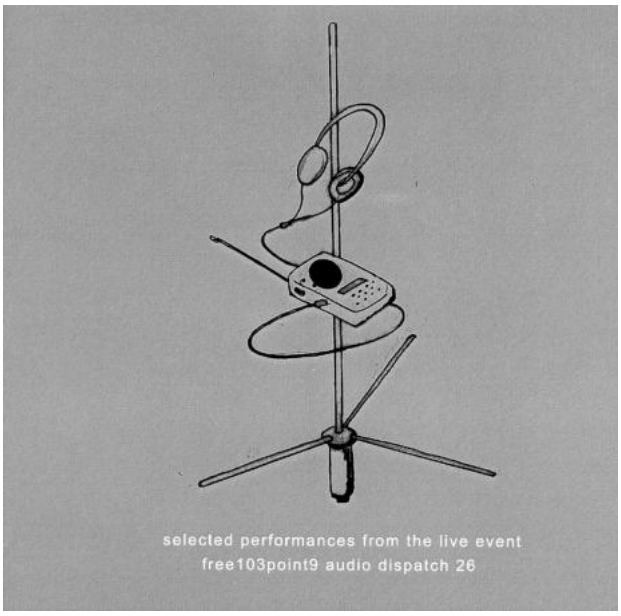
Scape 2 (AD019) features many names from the sound art brigade featured on Crossed Circuits above; 11 abstract works originally performed in 2004 at Flux Factory. Issued as two CDs which are meant to be played at random on big sound systems! Again, generous helpings of electronic sound-scaping and drone exploration of the first water, some with drum machines added. Includes Roe, Mikas, Bua, Scanner, Nagai, Owen, plus Aaron S Davidson, Damian Catera, Radio Rudio and neuroTransmitter. A very good one.

Radio 4x4 at Rock's Role (after Ryoanj) (AD025) is a DVD document of a performance event at Art In General NYC. I see four guys sitting at laptops and mixing desks, making spontaneous glitchy drone; they were Gabriel Burian-Mohr, David Galbraith, David Matorin and Andrew Neumann. Galbraith's solo work has been reviewed in TSP, but he's less aggressive than normal here. This is pretty much an NYC reinvention of the MEGO scene; the music they're making is OK, but the performers don't half look solemn!

Dado Blade (AD012) from 2003 features four contributors – Shawn Onsgard, Aaron S Davidson, Melissa Dubbin and Jared Ashburn. Various (mostly rather pretentious) approaches to live electronics and sampling work, often juxtaposing the laptop work with voice recordings.

Tune (In))) The Kitchen (AD026). This is the best of the batch! Tune (In))) is a series of sound events comprising multiple live performances all happening at once – the idea is that the listeners navigate along the FM dial to various pre-arranged station points, and select what listening events they may. What a concept – very Cagean I'm sure. It so happens that some of the best stuff is also preserved on this CD! Radio Guitar are Peggy Awesh and Barbara Ess and their self-titled CD on Ecstatic Peace is one of my all-time faves. Here they have 20 glorious minutes to themselves, with 'Thrum (Kitchen Mix)', a simply beautiful mix of soaring sounds, found sounds, background noise and music, in a lovely suspended chaos. Ben Owen has 12 minutes of static, recorded direct from another radio set, plus gentle environmental sounds from his apartment. Damian Catera went one better – he did live samples of the contributors to the Tune (In)))) event, including live manipulation of Thurston Moore's guitar! Splendid noisy mayhem results. Plus 30 minutes of Scanner, and students from Liberty High School. Musta been a remarkable event, the full grandeur of which this release can only hint at, but still a great listen itself.

15 generous tracks on *Radio Action II* (AD020), all sound works commissioned for the station, of which the stipulation is that they must use radio transmissions as the instrument or theme. Includes Radio Rudio, Keith Obadike, Bua, The Dust Dive, Sabers. Marcel Blum, Roe, Joshua Fried, Mikas, 31 Down,



Mammai, Ben Owen and more...the more abstract pieces have the most appeal, but there's some sparing use of music here too. Another very strong release, recommended for its wide-ranging approach to experimentation.

Skyline's *Private Sectors (noiseotica v.3)* (AD024) is a CD by a quartet using turntables, electronics, and guitars alongside radio sample work. Of the batch in the parcel, perhaps the most 'conventional' as regards their approach and sound, but still very much in the radio aesthetic of the label...may appeal (at a pinch) to fans of modern urban music, with plenty beats and ethnic poly-rhythms a-plenty. The title 'Bollywood Implant' should give you some clues. Also the most dense-sounding of all these records, almost paranoid in its edginess. The band are JB, Damian Catera, DJZ and V Olson.

N.R.A. (AD023) is a more ordinary improv CD, performed by Tatsuya Nakatani, Vic Rawlings and Ricardo Arias. Percussion, cello and live electronics; scrape and rumble music that gets your instep itching. Not bad actually; at least they get more agitated than most quiet improvisers. Recorded live at a 2004 festival of free jazz and electronics.

Constructive Engagement (AD02LP) is a vinyl LP, mostly put together by Tom Roe with help from Mikas, Kelly Benjamin, Barry London, Tony Flynn and others, all of whom are credited as 'performers/reporters'. The sound comprises mostly documentary recordings, fetched from various political protests, and re-edited into these semi-composed electro-acoustic type suites along with some low-key clunky electronic music. This form of sonic protest music is, as far as I know, unique to this station. They also released it as a CD and it was reviewed in issue 12; I didn't much like it then, but now it seems just right, a lot of murmuring, chuntering, tape loops and murk, forming a pleasant soup of sound.

31 Down's CD *Noise Noir* (AD 016) is extremely unusual, a piece of avant-garde radio theatre! Clearly inspired by detective fiction and movies from the film noir age, it's a distinctively skewed take on same with its layered cross-referenced patterns of noise, spoken word and sound effects. Includes plenty of ringing phones, sirens, morgue and nightclub references and other hackneyed plot devices from this genre, all cleverly reworked. Positively gripping piece! Realised by Ryan Holsopple with help of Matt Bua and many talented actors doing the spoken-word stuff, plus live drumming and bass. Great pulp fiction in sound; if only the cover art were more in keeping!

The Interactive Audio Response Kit (AD018) is a double LP packaged to look like a 'Top Secret' file or dossier, with a manilla folder and various documents paper-clipped onto the plain white cover. The literature borders on the subversive, suggesting that left-field radio broadcasting may function as some form of silent warfare against the enemy. The LPs are in fact the same LP twice over, presumably intended as a tool for DJs armed with twin decks and a PA system, if diagram labels are anything to go by. The sounds include minimal beats and electronics, along with spoken-word materials and found sounds with a critical edge; one cut-up piece make President George Bush sound like a mumbling buffoon. Not one to sit and listen to at home (the sounds are pretty boring on their own) but instead one to take out to a public place and use in performance, as part of a sonic arsenal.

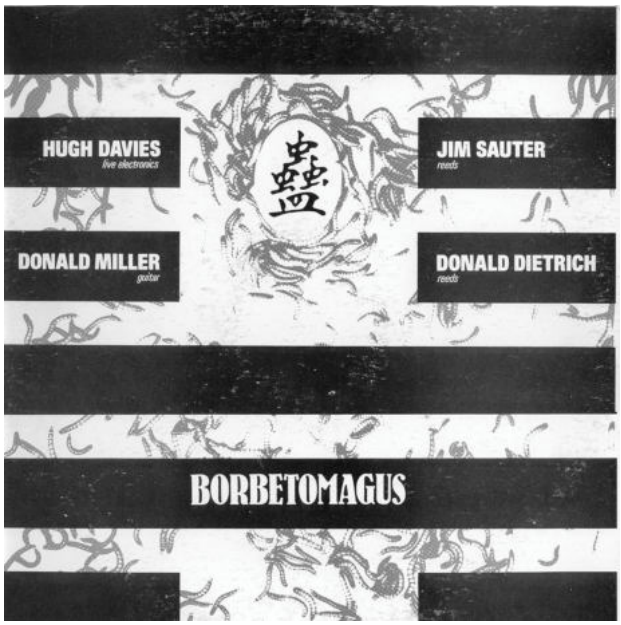
Graduation (AD017) is a single LP of loud and crazy free music, played by the Graduation Trio of Nels Cline, Chris Corsano and Carlos Giffoni, recorded live in Brooklyn in 2003. The most 'musical' offering in the package here, among all the other CDRs which mostly tend towards some form of radiophonic composition, documentation, or left-wing statement; this is just enjoyable jazzy electronic racket, propelled by Corsano's brilliant drumming. The B-side offers some spectacular moog synth noises. Sun Ra fans should try and seek this out. Fine black and white screenprint art by Meerk Puffy is pasted onto plain white sleeve. Ace!

Free 103.9
5662 Route 23
Acra
NY 12405
USA
info@free103point9.org
www.free103point9.org

Vinyl Viands

BITE ON THE BULLET AS YOU BAFFLE THESE BLACK BALLOONS!

Another random selection drawn from the record collecting of the Editor. Written November-December 2004, August-October 2005. Includes an account of record shops in Ahmerst MA and environs! (ED PINSENT)



Borbetomagus

Work on What Has Been Spoiled

USA AGARIC RECORDS 1981 (1981)

Who among us nowadays can say they're immune to the e-Bay bug? I'm sure not. Held out as long as I could but eventually succumbed to temptation. This wasn't the first LP I ever put in a bid for. That was Max Neuhaus, his percussion LP for Columbia. When I actually won the darn thing and (more to my amazement) it actually turned up in the mail, this seemed to be the turning point for me. Today, of course, I'm one of the richest men in the country – and all thanks to e-Bay. Just when I think I've nabbed as many LPs as possible by this noisy combo, something else turns up. Glad I got this one though which was specially shipped in all the way from Japan, where they know a thing or two about rare vinyl. This one is the best thing I've heard by them – it sounds quite different to a lot of their records, and it's quieter too. Perhaps both these qualities can be ascribed to presence of the great Hugh Davies, adding his electronic dimension. Seems an unlikely combination too – the three Americans who comprise the 'Borbies' are all beefy, burly chaps and hard-drinking wild-eyed crazies, and Hugh Davies was an urbane sophisticated Englishman. But sonically, they speak the same language. This also has a sumptuous sleeve printed in red to look like an I-Ching ideogram, with the band's 'emblem' – a photograph of some worms – at the centre. Their name means City of Worms. This is nothing to do with Diet of Worms, which in fact refers to a Synodical gathering of the early church. A lot of people think a 'diet of worms' is some kind of penitential act, but they are mistaken. I seem to listen to this record quite a lot, whereas my other Borb LPs don't get spun nearly as much.

Gilius Van Bergeijk

Over de Dood en de Tijd

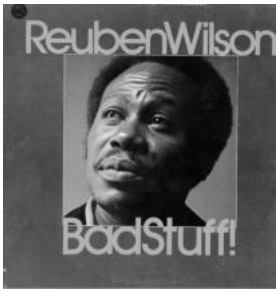
HOLLAND COMPOSERS' VOICE 8203 / DONEMUS (ND)

This Dutch composer has a name that rolls off the tongue – at least it does if you're of the Netherlandish persuasion. The last time I went into a record shop and tried ordering his back catalogue, I tried pronouncing his name to the clerk behind the counter. I walked out the shop with two metal birdcages. Here, Bergeijk takes an unpromising bit of source material – I think it's some tedious German lieder or other by Schubert – and remakes it using electro-acoustical methods. There's also some barrel-organ stuff on side two. By turns soothing and harsh, this is everything you could expect from a night out in Amsterdam.

Reuben Wilson

Bad Stuff!

USA GROOVE MERCHANT GM-4404 2 x LP (1975)

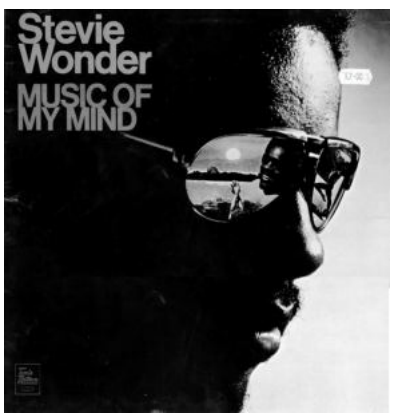


An uncharacteristic lapse for me into the 'soul jazz' (as this area has since become known I gather) zones of collectorship, but this is in fact a great double LP of tasty Hammond organ instrumentals, which I intend to file alongside my Timmy Thomas LP when I have the time. Just can't get enough of the Hammond organ sound and even seek out third-rate Krautrock LPs, basing my selection on presence of a Hammond B3 on the alb. Another good Hammond UK prog LP is the Quatermass one originally on EMI Harvest. I think Wilson also had a few Blue Note LPs which got reissued; his sidemen are in the more conventional jazz area, and some of these numbers are (for me) ruined by excessive sax parping, but in the main it's tasteful and relaxing. Sure to prove effective if I ever used it as part of a seduction kit. This record was first played to me in 1981, when college room-mates decided to 'prove' to me that proper jazz (eg Miles Davis, Coltrane, Ornette) was pretentious and cold and far too artistic to waste any time with. Wilson is certainly unpretentious and he's as hot as a pistol (or at least as warm as a funky soufflé), but even so that's no reason for anyone to diss Miles.

Stevie Wonder

Music of My Mind

UK TAMLA MOTOWN / EMI RECORDS LTD STMA 8002 (1972)



Another, perhaps, uncharacteristic foray into soul proper, but I'm building up a pretty good Stevie

Wonder collection now and am prepared to go the wall about it if need be. His early Motown career is a bit of a joke, when he was touted around as a entertaining kid genius with his harmonica and his sparky on-stage demeanour. This LP by contrast signals start of his mature period and a new contractual arrangement with Berry Gordy. I wanted to investigate mainly to hear the Moog and ARP work, for which technical support was provided by Malcolm Cecil and Robert Margouleff (who later became TONTO's Expanding Head Band). It's kinda significant as an early example of the (then) new electronics capabilities being used on a popular-selling record; it's to Wonder's credit that he caused this to happen, and that he gave credit to the two guys who showed him how to do it – to the extent of even playing some of it for him, it seems. This arrangement lasted for the next two LPs, *Fulfillingness First Finale* and *Innervisions*, but Cecil and Margouleff's names got smaller on the covers, while Stevie's got bigger. I gather something similar happened with George Harrison, who released a ludicrous electronic LP on the Zapple label in 1969, taking all the credit for someone else's Moog work. However he also acquired a Moog of his own and Lennon used it to great effect on the Abbey Road LP. For further info, see the book *Analog Days* (Trevor Pinch and Frank Trocco, Harvard University Press 2002).

Music of My Mind is a fine LP by any standards though, and it's encouraging the way Stevie Wonder took himself a lot more seriously as an artist than the label did, thus allowing himself to mature and grow in a way that Michael Jackson didn't. Wonder has some smashing hit tunes, but his album tracks are also real beauts, and he seemed to take to the electronic keyboards instantaneously. Even when it meant tedious overdubbing of instrumental lines, because keyboards weren't polyphonic in them days. This is out on budget CD, but the LP has a striking photo-collage cover that comes close to something Miles would be proud of, and works best in gatefold mode.

David Bowie
Lodger
UK RCA LIMITED BOW LP 1 (1979)

Glad I got round to retrieving this item from the racks of jettisoned vinyl. This one and *Scary Monsters* ended up being shed from my collection, when in my younger days I was weeding out vinyl for no good reason. The core Bowie collection remains intact. *Lodger* in fact has some of the man's strongest songs. Even 'Look Back in Anger' has its moments, as I was reminded when I saw it on the Bowie DVD collection. For a while after buying this again, I was obsessed with 'Red Sails', where the band do a near-perfect Neu! impersonation, while Bowie's compressed lyric has fragmented details of a mercenary merchant seaman and his picaresque adventures in some imaginary between-the-wars Europe. (These penetrating observations aren't mine by the way – they come from a book about Bowie by Nicolas Pegg.) In 2004, I now wonder if the backing track wasn't heavily edited from longer sessions by Brian Eno, using his musicianly skills and selecting the best bits from an unruly, lengthy jam. Of course none of this occurred to me in 1979 when I first owned the LP. Another great track is 'Boys Keep Swinging'. I love the pure-noise segment that constitutes a solo. Must be lots of tape editing there too. This was Bowie's best ever band if you ask me – Alomar, Davis and Murray. Too bad he's crap now, because although *1: Outside* was a good comeback for him in the 1990s, it turned out to be a fluke.

Iancu Dumitrescu
Grande Ourse / Aulodie Mioritică
ROMANIA ELECTRECORD ST-ECE 02720 (1984)

Lovely vinyl pressing in a sumptuous purple sleeve. Got a fair chunk of this doomy Romanian's work on CD now, but still there's some compositions on here I never heard before, mostly dark, menacing and monotonous. The contrabass of soloist Fernando Grillo on side two is particularly ferocious. Also a nice cover photo of the composer from when he looked younger and far less portly – he developed into something of a jowly, chubby bear, no doubt from consuming too many plates of fine Hungarian goulash with double cream and mashed potatoes. Perhaps he knew this would happen to him and named this work 'Great Bear' as a result. I would never have heard this guy's work, were it not for an introductory article and interview in *Resonance* magazine. As I recall he was into the idea of numbers having souls, some crazy notion developed by philosopher Edmund Husserl. Seriously recommend you investigate this distinctive music as soon as you can. This one was nabbed very cheaply at a Croydon Record Fair, where dealer was unaware of what it was and had filed it under 'European Free Jazz'. Well, as I always say when I score a record nobody else wants, more cabbage for me!

Mirror
Front Row Centre
GERMANY DIE STADT DS 25 (ND)

Don't know much about these clowns, except having seen them (or the 'core' members maybe) perform at Dundee, they certainly come across as very solemn and serious. The records aren't much in the way of light relief either. I bought two LPs at the same time and it has taken a while for them to make any sense – very ceremonial, slow-moving drones. They seem to work best late at night, which may be in keeping with the nocturnal and dark aspirations of this slightly gothic, art-industrial combo. The sleeve art features that kind of shapeless painterly murk, heavily influenced by the decalcomania paintings of Max Ernst, only nowhere near as good. The idea is that you peer into them for long hours, presumably whacked out of skull on various chemical additives, until mysterious faces start to appear in the miasma. Andrew Chalk is one of them and I gather they are well-respected about the town. This one's on that obscure German label and is pressed in clear vinyl of a greenish hue.

Man
Be good to yourself at least once a day
UK UNITED ARTISTS UAG 29417 (1972)

By rights I should be reviewing Help Yourself, a nice vinyl item I bought in August 2003 at a record fair in Oxford. Remember doing so because John Bagnall pulled it out of a box and said, 'you'll probably like this'. Without hesitation, I forked over a couple of 'sky-divers' to the dealer, trusting the word of Baggy. Help Yourself are this excellent 'meandering'

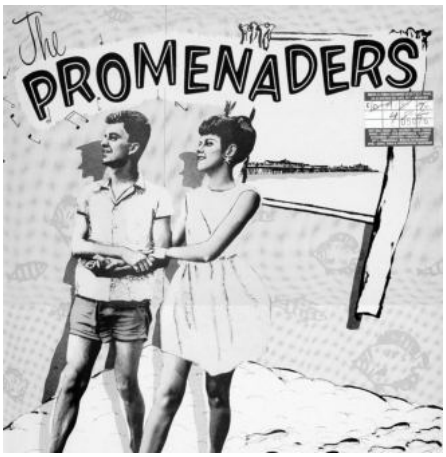
UK guitar band of the 1970s who, when they got going, matched the best of The Grateful Dead (or at least satisfy my lust for discursive rock noodling). About a year later I snapped up a double CD set of Help Yourself and found further satisfaction in those discs. So by logical reasoning, I figured my next step was to make a concerted effort to get 'into' Man, even though they are Welsh, which is always a drawback in my eyes. This one turned up at affordable price and though it lacks inner bag, it does have this massive foldout map thing in the centre, in good intact state (meaning previous owner was not necessarily a stupid hippie who set it on fire while trying to scorch a lump of cannabis resin over it). Needless to remark the music offers a great 'stone groove'. If you'll indulge me for one minute more, may I also recommend Mighty Baby, another UK act who are great in this area of 'keeping it up' for a long time and weaving their melodic lines through extended free-weaving jam patterns. They aren't represented at their best on studio records, but what can you do.

Richard Teitelbaum

Blends & The Digital Pianos

[USA] LUMINA RECORDS L005 (1984)

Another terrif record by one of my favourite 'overlooked' USA geniuses, who has managed to straddle composition, improv and jazz areas without ever coming a cropper or getting too pretentious. Normally these 'Third Stream' bozos make complete twerps of themselves with their high-minded dilly-dallying. Not good old 'Teiters'. His *Timezones* rec is a fine use of analogue synths and I'm always blithering on about his duos with Anthony Braxton. He used to be part of MEV and, since they seem to have reformed recently, still is.



Deaf School

2nd Honeymoon

UK WARNER BROS RECORDS K56280 (1976)

Finally snagged a good quality vinyl pressing of this one. It's an adolescent favourite of mine, played it to death when at sixth form and still have the tape copy that a school chum made for me! Deaf School were a Liverpool art-school combo who managed about 3 LPs, but never really took off – and perhaps they could have been as big as Sad Café, Tyla Gang or The Kursaal Flyers. Associated with the Eric's scene and perhaps with Probe Records too. A large-scale collective, they sometimes had dozens of musicians on stage, but only about eight of them wound up on this studio debut. And of course by the time they got into the studio they were doing something quite different anyway. I like this record because it has decent melodies and peculiar lyrics (most of them quite poignant, in a corny sorta way), and every song was strong on story-telling – in fact one guesses that some of the members were failed film-makers. There were three lead vocalists, and they really 'act out' the songs. Plus the front cover, which looks like an idealised scene from a movie (tellingly, the back cover pulls back to reveal it's a faked shoot with a backdrop). When I spin it now I notice how much musical content they pack into a short song – lots of time changes, little instrumentals, clever touches…it's endearing stuff. Saw them live precisely once at the Liverpool Empire and still remember it – an entertaining, cabaret-styled show, and some proto-punk rock songs even (not here; look to the second LP). Enrico Cadillac was the main man (he musta borrowed some ideas from Bryan Ferry!), and Clive Langer the guitarist went on to become a famed producer in the 1980s. Now I'm turning into fucking *Mojo* magazine…anyway a nice record.

The Promenaders

The Promenaders

UK Y RECORDS Y31 (1982)

Inspired I think by the Trevor Wishart *Beach Singularity* escapade, The Promenaders are an emblem of one of the things that made the London Musician's Collective an eccentric and interesting thing (as it once was). Here we find various LMC members 'slumming it' and playing a diverse, eclectic and rich mixture of cover versions - popular song, show tunes, rock and roll, country and western, ska, classical music, free jazz, and all points in between. How many LPs do you own that will take you from 'Nellie the Elephant' to 'Moon River' via Albert Ayler, and back again? This is more in Bonzos / Alberts territory than free improvisation. The musicians play more or less in the style of a small brass band combo, though with other instruments like an electric guitar. I think the band included Lol Coxhill, Paul Burrell, Max Eastley and Steve Beresford, among others – certainly anyone who had a genuine love for popular song and wasn't averse to a nice melody. Sleeve credits don't reveal this but instead provide a list of wacky aliases for them all. As I recall, The Promenaders came to Coventry Art School when I was studying there and did a very assured performance in the lobby there, during the 'Events Week'. Their banter in between songs was extremely witty and laced with sarcasm. They announced they would do a special instrumental break for the next number, influenced by *Tubular Bells*. 'I don't care for it much myself,' sneered the singer, 'but I hear it's terribly popular!' In fact, when the break came, it was a spot-on impersonation of the drum break from 'Set the Controls for the Heart of the Sun'. On top of this Lol Coxhill played a gorgeous trilling melody which moistens my eyes every time I remember it.

Thin Lizzy

Jailbreak

UK VERTIGO ACBR 252 (1976)

Another one from 'old home week', and another favourite of your 16 year-old editor, except I never owned it on vinyl. I do now. Guess what? This is practically a pop-heavy metal masterpiece – the songs are fantastic, there's not an inch of wasted space on the record, it's beautifully produced, and the two lead guitarists deliver excellent melodic solos. And Phil Lynnot is a better singer than anyone who's been in the charts since 1985. This was their 'breakthrough' LP as I recall (the hit single was 'Boys are back in Town'), but I always liked 'Whiskey in the Jar' before this too. They too played Liverpool Empire, it was reported to me. The front 5 rows of the stalls were completely demolished, it seems. Make of this what you will. I might start looking for *Johnny the Fox* next, although as I recall that one had a fair bit of filler material. Add to this a Jack Kirby comic book styled gatefold sleeve with cut-out holes and, well, how can you resist?

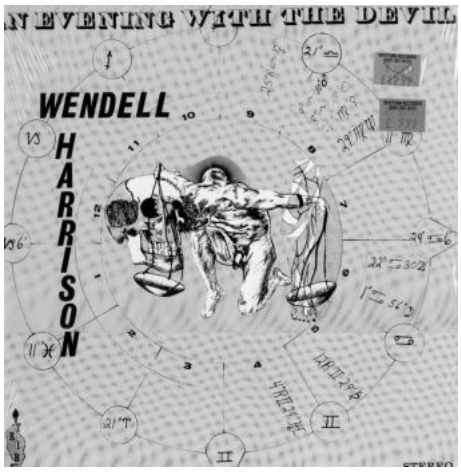
Wendell Harrison and The Tribe

An Evening With The Devil

USA TRIBE PRSD-2212 (ND)

This one turned up in Rhythm Records of Camden Town, a lovely shop which has now joined the ranks of great vinyl emporiums in the sky. It's closed down in other words. The market traders of Camden Town decided there weren't enough shops selling leather boots, belts and drug paraphernalia, so the vinyl shop had to go. How was I to know this would be one of the last LPs I bought there? It's a reissue, natch, but

information about the original is hard to come by. It's basically an obscure bonkers free jazz unit from the early 1970s, who deliver a spirited voodoo-styled dark rhythmical jazz with occasional poetry interludes thrown on top. I played 'Mary Had an Abortion' on the radio for Halloween, causing one listener to phone up in amazement. I think this may be something to do with the vividness of the recording; it's not hi-fidelity, but there's a baleful presence to the performances that simply pours off the grooves like so much ectoplasmic glop. This is one of the subtler examples of post civil-rights Afro-American jazz statements that is positively labyrinthine in its subversive critique of dominant white bourgeois culture; it seems to propose some form of overthrow, not through violence or sloganeering or protest marches, but through sly and subtle satire that makes its point as swiftly as an unnoticed stiletto blade. You think the blow has missed, then find a gaping wound in your side.



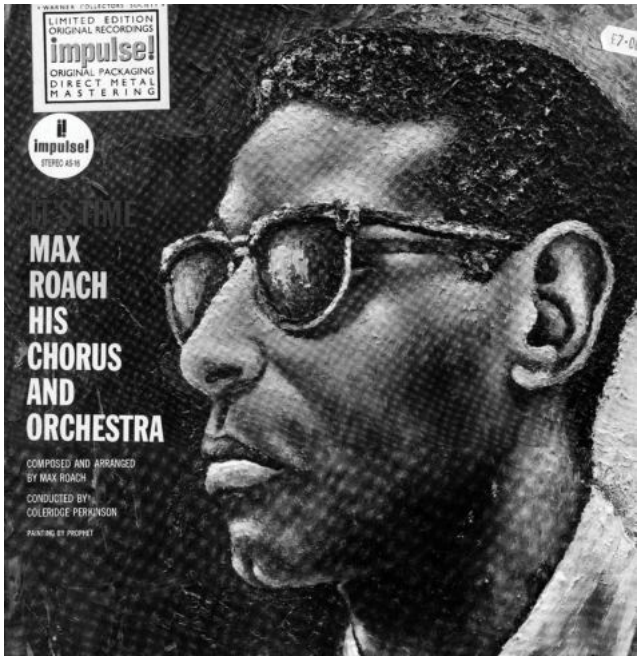
Various

Musique Experimentale. Enregistrements realises par le Groupe de Recherches Musicales

FRANCE DISQUES BAM LD 071 (1962)

One of those French rarities on the BAM label, of which the collector prices continue to soar through the ceiling – along with my blood pressure whenever I see one. There was a BAM record (not this one) lurking in a box at These Records, which I was fortunate enough to be allowed to peruse on the very last day of the existence of said shop – the shopkeepers called it 'the dangerous box', on account of the astronomically rare and expensive slabs of black stuff lurking therein. However, even figures of £150 when bandied around carelessly were not sufficient to impress These, and item was not snagged. This one turned up for £75 at a record fair in Olympia, and was purchased with batch of other items (including two fairly-priced Stockhausens on DG), so was secured for a slightly less than asking price in a 'deal'. You see, this is how we sad collectors attempt to justify these ludicrous purchases…such self-delusion…

At all events, the LP contains some fine examples of musique concrète from the INA GRM studios not heard by me anywhere else; presumably a lot of this early stuff remains uncollected on compact disc as yet. The 'cut' by Luc Ferrari is particularly strong; something to do with tautology, but is filled with darkness and clashing repetitions that are amazingly prescient for the time. And speaking of dates, it troubled me greatly that there are no reliable dates on sleeve for the compositions, except one. Through careful reading of sleeve with a magnifying glass, I've discovered that the LP was released in 1962, but it wouldn't have hurt the compilers to provide a little more factual information! Instead, it's all pretentious descriptions of the composers' intentions – very cerebral. One of them is something to do with Jesus' last words on the cross. Even when they went 'radical', it seems the French couldn't suppress their traditional Catholicism – and a good thing too if you ask me. Also of note is the incredible slimness of the sleeve – little more than two pieces of laminated paper, meaning no spine, meaning I'll probably never find this beaut again once it's filed away. Sob! Another 75 big ones up the chute…



Max Roach

It's Time

[GERMANY] IMPULSE! AS-16 LP (ND)

The amazing drummer Roach, here with His Chorus and Orchestra. Have been discovering his Impulse LPs in a sporadic way of late and find they're really awfully good, doncha know. Obviously, no white liberal record-collector dare show his face without a copy of *Freedom Now We Insist*, the civil rights drum suite composed by Roach which is fine music and has rarely been equalled, not even by such politically astute commentators in pop music as The Redskins, Crass or Chumbawumba. This one may have some civil rights subtext, but such content has probably been subsumed in the lush arrangements, meaning we end up with an interesting hybrid of free jazz, drum solos and gospel-inspired abstract choir stylings. The choir comprised 12 singers who aren't named on the record, probably due to legal or copyright considerations, or the general uncharitableness of record companies back in those dark days. What attracted me mostly was the appearance of Abbey Lincoln, who sang memorably on the *Freedom Now* suite, but only does one song here. But what a belter it be. File alongside your other examples of right-on soul diva / radical singers such as Jeanne Lee with Archie Shepp, or Mary Maria, the singer with Albert Ayler on *Music is the Healing Force of the Universe*. Come to think of it, those are the only examples that spring to mind at the moment. Cover has a great impasto painting of Roach's face, by Prophet. One of those nifty Impulse 'Limited Edition' reissues from a time when the catalogue was owned by Warners; usually pressed in Europe, but sleeves used the USA 'pastedown' method for building the sturdy gatefold sleeves, which appeals. These LPS aren't as easy to find as they used to be.

Vinyl Viands Beyond the Seas

Fetched back from my USA trip were the following items below. All from one day's shopping, except those purchased from Swill Radio list two days later. Have indicated prices in US dollars. There was so much vinyl by the end of it that I had to have it shipped back to the UK, costing another $78!

Yma Sumac
Inca Taqui
USA CAPITOL L423 10″ LP (ND)
Yma Sumac
Legend of the Sun Virgin
USA CAPITOL DDN 299 Boxed set of 10″ records (ND)

Mr IFCO kindly took me on a record-buying spree one sunny Friday. On the ride in the car we were discussing Yma Sumac. If you're a regular reader, you'll know she's like a goddess to me, so imagine how I felt when Mr IFCO and his wife had actually met the legend herself! She was playing an event in Boston or Cambridge, so they drove off to see her sing and then got to meet her backstage. On learning names of her visitors, La Sumac quipped 'Ah, Scott…that reminds me of my first husband. He used to drink nothing but Scotch!' When I heard that Scott had also kissed Yma Sumac's hand as they left, I told him he should have his lips surgically removed and put them on eBay.

Within moments of hearing said anecdote, the green-eyed God had taken hold of me, and I was vowing the vengeful slaughter of this man who had supplanted me as the rightful kisser of La Sumac's hand. But by then we had landed at Mystery Train records, a fine emporium where I came across these two Sumac items, and immediately pounced like a Peruvian jaguar. When I brought them up to the till, the clerk had a little trouble extricating the sleeves from my vice-like grip, but fortunately he had couple of surgeons standing by armed with pincers. There's no need for me to play these copies, but the sheen and shine of the sleeve art is more than enough to warrant ownership, let alone the authority they hold as objects from a bygone era. I have heard of (and seen) these objects going for silly prices, so was glad of a shot at them! *Sun Virgin* was the very first Sumac record I heard, though not the first I owned. *Inca Taqui* is kind of hard to get for some reason, although it was reissued on a split LP with *Voice of the Xtabay*. There's a further New England / MA connection, as those wacky Twisted Village fellows in Cambridge released their *Spirit Of Yma* LP

many years ago, long before it was fashionable to drop the name of Exotica recording artistes, cover of which featured Kate Biggar with a copy of Yma's first LP poised temptingly between her spread thighs. Later that week, a photo of myself with the IFCO house cat featured me holding my copy of *Inca Taqui*, though not in quite the same way. Also purchased from Mystery Train Records:

Ferial Confine
The Full Use of Nothing
USA FUSETRON FUSE024 (1988)

A Scott Foust recommendation. Ferial Confine has done some work with The New Blockaders and may have a whole history I'm not yet aware of. Turns out to be a splendid scrapey, buzzy tape-work racket recorded in 1984-85, ending with distant piano music layered on top. A totally coherent conceptual work over two sides of vinyl. And at a bargain price. Great! Cost - $5.00

Various
Dry Lungs II
USA PLACEBO PLA 21 (1986)

Normally a title like that would put me right off, but this collection has appeared on Stefan Jaworzyn's Scum Lists frequently, so I thought it might be worth checking out. Maybe this is the shop he gets his supplies from? Has some of the better proponents of recent menacing drone-noise, including Asmus Tietchens, If, Bwana, Randy Greif and Jarboe; also some 'industrial' clowns like Severed Heads and japnoise from Hijoh Kaiden. Cost - $10.00

Nuno Canavarro
Flux Quba
USA MOIKAI M1 (1988)

An oddity from Portugal reissued on this American label. $9.00

Also at this shop I picked up a nice New American Library edition of the Yellow Submarine paperback. I've had the New English Library version for years, but this one has a different cover. Cost about $1.00.

Henry Cowell
The Piano Music of Henry Cowell
USA FOLKWAYS FM 3349 (1963)
$15.00

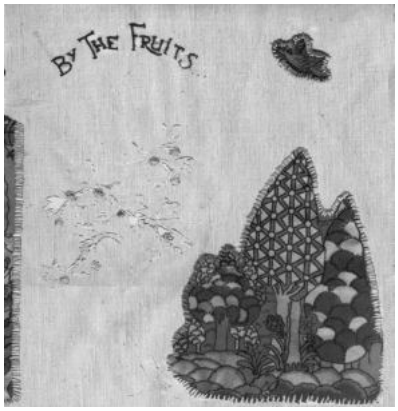
Miyoshi / Takemitsu / Mayuzumi
New Music From Japan
USA ODYSSEY 32 16 0152 (ND)
$5.50

These two came from Dynamite Records, a shop near the precincts of one of the many Universities in the state. We had high hopes, but found the shop pretty disappointing. Scott noted that most of the stock seemed the same from many years ago, and not much new stuff was coming in at all. He managed to find a New Order bootleg-ish release, added it to my pile, and I bought all three LPs from a young bearded fellow whose Union Jack boxer shorts were clearly visible from the top of his ill-fitting jeans. I was encouraged by the sight of my homeland's flag, even though I'm not a patriot, but it was still not a propitious omen; we had something of a language problem, as when I said 'These three, please' the clerk thought I meant 'Are these free?', and had to explain to me the rudiments of the monetary system in the USA. Scott was pleased with his New Order boot. The Henry Cowell LP is pretty good, even if it is from Hampshire College record library (some sticker tears etc); I wanted to investigate the music of this early Yankee maverick, having read about his piano inventions in the Phaidon book. He's kind of like a Syd Barrett figure in the avant-classical world; produced just a handful of exquisite works in a short space of time, and had them analysed to death ever since. Peformances by the composer; very much like miniature paintings, with very narrative titles like 'Trumpet of Angus Og', 'The Snows of Fujiyama', and 'Tides of Manaunaun'. The *New Music from Japan* thing is to add to my collection of Japanese modernist composition. I've never been disappointed by any of these, although of course Toru Takemitsu is the name to follow.

From Yodsales came the motherlode of goodies below. The Yod Shop was something of an experience, situated in a converted warehouse where most of the space has been leased to small offices, used by artists and craftsmen. Yod was right on the top floor and packed floor to ceiling with shelves of neatly-arranged LPs and books, which as it turned out were not for sale – these were merely new accessions waiting to be added to the Byron Coley collection. The actual Yod stock was in a small back room.

Gang Gang Dance
Gang Gang Dance
USA FUSETRON032 LP (ND)

Debut LP I think by this mystery bunch of collective improvisers. Probably a bit weirder than the follow-up CD as since found, more diffuse, meandering and almost totally instrumental too. A bit inconclusive, but a good LP of unhinged and semi-skilled group improvisation. Covers and inserts are designed to maximise disorientation and confusion. Cost - $15.00



Various Artists
By The Fruits You Shall Know The Roots
USA ECLIPSE / TIMELAG RECORDS 3 x LP (ND)

Probably one of the first major 'surveys' of recent USA folk-inspired underground scene. A lot of acoustic guitars and wailing abounds. Beautiful packaging unfolds into a large full-colour sheet, resembling a crazy quilt and a psychedelic poster on verso. Attempt to connect the music with home-grown American craft forms. There's Six Organs of Admittance; also Matt Valentine playing in a large combo featuring Chris Corsano. Jack Rose has a couple of sides; surprising that I haven't yet grown to love this guy's work unreservedly, as he's tremendously skilled and deeply inspired by many music forms which I adore. It's possible to put him third in a line from Mississippi John Hurt to John Fahey. Except Rose is extremely reverential to both these sources. Joshua Burkett has a side, jamming with the Finnish folk-psychers, Kemialliset Ystävät. There's also a side of Dredd Foole, who I cannot abide. How anyone can even listen to this inane caterwauling and half-baked plunking is beyond me. As to why he's held in such awe-struck regard, I can't conceive. I'd almost rather endure Loren MazzaCane Connors, and that's saying something. Regardless, this is an important collection and probably already sold out. They advised me at Yod to snap it up quick. Cost - $40.00

Hair Police / The Dead Machines
Hills Have Eyes / Speech of the Eyeless Infants.
USA AM399 / GOT072 LP (ND)

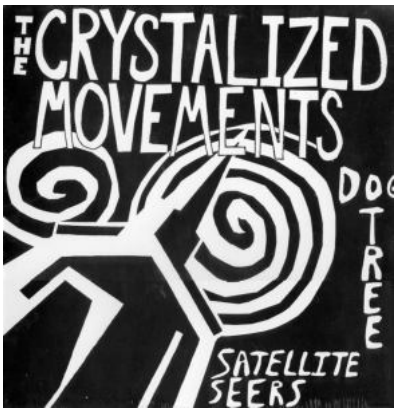
Have since heard other great records by these Wolf Eyes related projects – see the American section for reviews. The side by Dead Machines is very quiet, but still laced with mucho diabolical evil. The Hair Police side is just pure malice, a dose of caustic soda coursing through your veins. Incredible handmade cover too. Very nice solid artefact. Numbered 67/200. Cost - $20.00

Jack Rose
Raga Manifestos
USA ECLIPSE ECL-039 LP (ND)

A nice one by Jack Rose, everybody's favourite acoustic guitar hero. He is not only very able, he is also steeped in historic knowledge of American guitar history and probably owns the complete recorded works of Hawaiian guitarist Sol Hoopii. Music herein recorded between 2002-2004. This one arrives in a plain white sleeve decorated with old book engravings – always a popular motif. In Rough Trade shops this cost an arm and a leg! Cost - $15.00

Terminals
Black Creek
USA SILTBREEZE SB24 7″

Haven't heard it yet. I asked the Yod sales guy for his advice, who it so happened was Matt Krefting, a fiend of Scott's who appeared in the *Here's To Love!* movie. Matt's task was to pick out at least one record which would amaze me or would otherwise make the USA trip totally worthwhile. He nearly folded under the pressure, but eventually alighted on this single. Terminals are from New Zealand. Cost - $4.00.



The Crystalized Movements
Dog Tree Satellite Seers
USA FORCED EXPOSURE FE-011 (1989)

Just one more to add to my collection of the works of Wayne Rogers and associated projects. 11 songs which will hopefully turn out to be loud fuzzed guitars and frantic badly-recorded drumming. Apparently Wayne and Kate continue to hold sway in Cambridge MA, exerting much power through their elitist and over-priced vinyl shopping emporium, Twisted Village. This is one record they managed to persuade Byron Coley to put out, described on insert as 'brilliant second LP by these Connecticut punk-psych legends'. Second FE pressing. Cost - $15.00

Joshua
Gold Cosmos
USA FEATHER ONE'S NEST J3LP (2001)

Joshua Burkett's collection of 14 songs from 2001. I think I was sent the CD copy of this, but I passed it to Marc Baines for review. No matter; here it is on vinyl. Cost - $20.00

Enos Slaughter
On Sunday
CONDUIT CREATIONS #003. S@1 #61

Had high hopes for this one; it features the guitarist Marc Orleans, who when he was with the vastly over-rated Sunburned Hand of the Man struck me as one of the few truly talented players in that unruly mob. Here he is with assorted pals from No-Neck and other NYC scenes, jamming away during the course of a single Sunday's recording. Certainly has its moments, but a bit too quiet and hesitant. Also a very flat recording. Doesn't quite register high enough on the weirdness meter. Cost - $10.00.

Copernicus
Deeper
USA NEVERMORE INC 2087 (1987)

'3rd LP by this untaggable NY genius' says the Yodsales catalogue. This may turn out to be a colossal mistake; Copernicus is one of those major freak-oddities which came highly recommended by Forced Exposure at the time (mainly by Jimmy I recall), but simply perusing the cover texts and images has been enough to knit my brow into a furled ridge of anxiety. I'll let you know if I ever get around to spinning it. He dresses up in a tuxedo and tie, performs poetry and songs with a small improvising orchestra. Gadzooks. Cost - $12.00

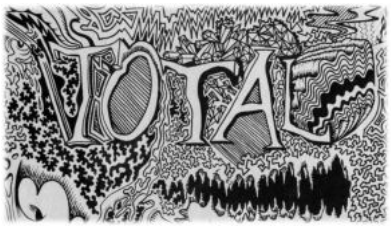
Remaining vinyls below were purchased from the Swill Radio stock of vinyl, piled high in cardboard boxes in the same room I'd been sleeping all week. I wasn't able too look at everything as there simply wasn't time, and it isn't all accessible.

Mouse On Mars
Instrumentals
GERMANY SONIG 01 (ND)

You may scoff, but I have a soft spot for these Cologne electronica whizz-kids. They still endure after many years; their remix CD is one of my fave collections. This is also the very first release on the Sonig label, from about 1996 or 1997 perhaps.

Total
Here Time is Space
USA MAJORA NO NUMBER 2 x LP (ND)

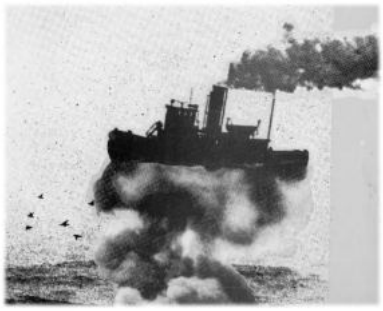
Great double LP of sprawling guitar jams, including the amazing 'Sunset Grinder', from Matthew Bower the UK underground hero who refuses to give up to this day. Recorded



in 1992-93. Cover depicts formless surreal cartoon shapes printed on a silver cover. Majora have also been home to Sun City Girls releases.

Tom Cora / David Moss
Cargo Cult Revival
USA RIFT RECORDS RIFT 5 (1983)

Had high hopes, though turns out to be a fairly standard LP of duo improv, all clattery percussion from Moss and busy cello-work (with some electronic additions) from the late Cora. However, it's from a vintage year for this sort of thing (1983) and Rift Records also released some great stuff by Fred Frith and Phil Minton. There's a Rift catalogue insert too. Great collage sleeve.



The Slits
In the Beginning
ITALY GET BACK GET 75 (2001)

My favourite all-female punk inspired combo. Here documented live in London in 1977 and 1981, and in the USA in 1980. The early cuts show them when they were still yet to be inspired by dub and reggae. The recording made in someone's front room ('Number One Enemy') features Nina Hagen on vox and is a real winner. Their general lack of ability is astounding and the singer's voice grates so much you could use it at a wine and cheese party. Not tough to get; in fact I saw it in Selectadisc a few months later.

Der Plan, Geri Reig. GERMANY WARNING RECORDS WR003 [1980].

East Bionic Symphonia. LAM RECORDS LA-3001.

Walter Marchetti, Per la sete del l'orecchio. ITALY VANDALIA RECORDS 10584 (ND).

Haven't heard these three yet!

Revisionism of The Residents

The Residents
The Warner Bros Album
UNRELEASED (1971)
The Residents
WB:RMX
USA CRYPTIC NO NUMBER CD (2003)

The Residents seem to be ambivalent about their early analogue material. Partly because it's analogue, partly because it's early. When they reissued their first few albums on CD in the late 80s they did so under the tongue-in-cheek banner of the 'Residents Classic series' (acknowledging to some extent that this was their best material); yet they also felt compelled to provide a 'Warning to Audiophiles' on the cover of *Meet The Residents* which apologised for the low-fi recording quality. One wonders how many audiophiles there are amongst the band's fanbase, but either way the warning amounted to one of their occasional yet revealing losses of nerve, and was totally unnecessary. Hi-fidelity was likely to be the last thing concerning anyone tuned into such a sonically inventive record, and it's hard to believe that the unconverted would have been won over had the record been more slickly produced. If anything, the Residents should have been apologising for the digital dishwater they were serving up on the new records they were releasing at the time (*The King and Eye* and *Our Favourite Flowers* in particular).

Whether for audio or aesthetic reasons, they seem to feel even stronger about their early 70s material. Meaning that, until recently, recordings like *Baby Sex, The Ballad of Stuffed Trigger, Rusty Coathangers for the Doctor*, and *The Warner Bros. Album* looked likely to remain as footnotes in their extensive self-created mythology, despite a significant demand for their release. It's a shame, because *Santa Dog* and *Meet The Residents* contain so much of the primary content that makes The Residents so important in the first place: the characters, stories and ideas that fed into *Vileness Fats*, for example. Further hints as to the extent of this rich fabric and network of mythical tales sometimes leak out, like the snippets from the very early live performances on the UWEB releases. The character for example who laments 'He's all alone, he has no home…he sits inside a microdot, and drinks pink lemon bone' might just be one of the key figures in this mysterious past. It would be interesting to try to decode this part of the Residents history. An essay is yet to be written that draws the significant connections between characters such as Arf and Omega, Wiscoosa, the Spotted Pinto Bean, Edweena, and Mortimer Snerd. What we need to assist us in that task is the equivalent of a Rosetta stone; *The Warner Bros. Album,* and the other early LPs, might be just that.

A couple of years ago music purporting to be *Baby Sex* and *The Warner Bros. Album* leaked out onto the Internet. Now it would take a braver Internet user than I to download a file named *Baby Sex*, but clicking on 'Go Get!' for *The Warner Bros Album* was a no-brainer. I haven't regretted it.

I won't go into why it's called *The Warner Bros Album* here, nor its related role in giving the band their name. (That story has been recounted many times but Penn & Teller tell it best, on the *Eyes Scream* VHS). Suffice it to say that this record isn't official Warner Bros product, nor is it The Residents' tribute to Bugs Bunny and Porky Pig. But it is an essential document of the Residents at their wildest, craziest best.

It was reputedly recorded and edited during 1970-1, condensed down from hours of jams, percussive exercises, tape experiments and untutored attempts at recording songs. The files I downloaded may not be the same as the original album. Indeed the track sequence differs from that documented by Resident insiders. What we do have is forty rough-hewn fragments of music, each lasting anything between 7 seconds and 4-and-a-half minutes. Many of these end abruptly and with no obvious musical justification, yet the resulting album works as both a taster for a longer LP (if one exists), and a work of musical collage in its own right; the Residents' own Faust Tapes.

Legend has it that one motivator for the album's creation was the Residents gaining access to a bunch of tape recorders. Tape technology has often been described as the key instrument for the band in its early years, yet if anything as sophisticated as a four-track recorder went anywhere near these recordings, I'd be amazed. A single mike in the middle of the room seems more likely. Whatever the case, the Residents' ambitions were already pushing them beyond the limitations of the technology available to them.

Were these the same Residents who made the records we know and love, or just some transient, embryonic configuration of the band? Well there's no mistaking the strangled falsetto of a (then unnamed) Mr Skull, weirdly sounding no younger than he does today. And fans of early tracks such as *Rest Aria* and *Edweena* will be delighted to hear several contributions from the much-missed piano-playing Resident (who our ears tell us left the band mid-way through the Classic period, taking his out-of-tune Joanna with him). That may even be Snakefinger producing those scary ear-blistering fuzz guitar sounds.

That's as musically accomplished as it gets – for the most part it sounds like these Residents were playing whatever came to hand - say an egg slice, a bunch of saucepans, and perhaps even some broken mattress springs for the trickier melodies - scraping and clattering away with a vigour and commitment that rendered the occasional bum notes irrelevant.

But it's important to stress that this is not some dusty historical artefact, of interest only to committed fans. It's both a fascinating insight into the band's early development, and a brilliant piece of music in its own right. If you haven't heard The Residents or connected with their ouevre, this might be a good place to start.

We hear the band explore ideas that would later coalesce on *Santa Dog* and *Meet The Residents*. It's all here, in nascent form. Track titles such as 'Baby Skeletons and Dogs', 'Snot and Feces' and 'Sweet Meat' provide early signs of the band's visceral preoccupations. Religion, one of their pet subjects, is tackled with humour somewhat broader than that we expect of The Residents ('Om is where the art is / God is where the fart is').

Military drum, boogie woogie, blues, ragtime, Wild West bar-room piano, scat singing, broadway showtunes, hippie folk songs and even a vigorous cover of *Maggie's Farm* all get Residential makeovers. File *The Warner Bros Album* under 'American musical history condensed', along with *Smile*, *Song Cycle*, *Double Bummer*, and, well, most of the Residents' official releases.

Even at this early stage they'd worked out how to express the extremes of desperate emotion that have given their work its greatest edge. A group round of "Every day I masturbate on a Mexican fag / he loves it but sometimes I fear it makes him gay" culminates alarmingly with all voices converging on a hysterical / accusatory chorus of "Gay! Gay! Gay!" (As a side note, I misheard 'Mexican fag' as 'American pie' on the first few listens. Maybe some Hollywood producer did too).

Significantly, at least one key lyric made its first appearance here: 'Oh Mommy, Oh Daddy, Can't you see that it's true / What the Beatles did to me, I Love Lucy Did To You'. This was of course reused as the name for the second-ever live performance as a group, but it also ties in to two of their major thematic preoccupations: the long-running campaign to demolish 1960s popular music, starting with The Beatles, through merciless parody and pastiche; and the more general attack on 'Mom and Dad' values of the past. The latter strain is most evident on the *Meet The Residents* LP, where virtually all the family values of 1950s suburbia are put through the grinder: just listen to that sneering sarcasm ('Merry Christmas Mom!') on 'Seasoned Greetings', and a family Christmas will never be the same.

Also interesting here are the ideas that would fall by the wayside. The booming feedback that dominates the excellent 'Psychedelic and orgasmic finale I' would be swiftly erased from their musical vocabulary in favour of more easily controlled sounds; more happily, crude political satire ('Sold American') would also get the heave-ho.

You can't get hold of *The Warner Bros Album* without, strictly speaking, breaking the law. But whilst we hear that the Residents were upset to discover that the record had leaked out, it's also not their style to embark on some corporate-style programme of legal revenge (touch wood). They decided to turn a negative into a positive, taking this as an invitation to revisit the tapes and give them a severe working over, the result being *WB:RMX.*

Artistically, this record is an unmitigated disaster. It simply takes random selections from the original tapes and puts them against a Techno backing, with loud beats and horrid electronic noises. Sure, it's Techno done The Residents way – but that's not saying very much. Their misguided attempts to do 'disco' music have frequently misfired badly, resulting in such abominations as *Kaw-liga* and its numerous remixes. Nonetheless, *WB:RMX* is worth hearing (once), as a prime example of artists intent on rewriting their own history. They're effectively so ashamed of this 'naïve' period of theirs that they want to efface it completely; it's as though they were crudely painting over their own early canvasses with gallons of black paint.

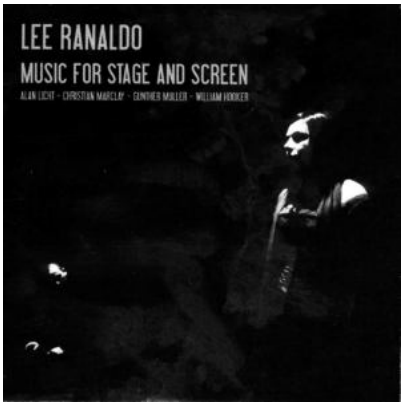
Through this action, the original meanings of the early work are not simply being obscured; they are being massacred. I heard the remix version before I heard the 'real' WB album; the differences are simply staggering. The original 1970s recordings contain stories, clues, fragments, hints; weird characters that are going to develop into other characters. As I've suggested, it's not too far-fetched to state that the pre-history of the *Santa Dog* characters and stories (and by extension, the bedrock of the *Vileness Fats* scenario) is encoded in the WB Album, in embryonic form. None of this content whatsoever is discernible in *WB:RMX*; whatever survives is cut to ribbons, torn out of context, and obscured by loud beats and electronic noise. It's scandalous behaviour; how could they treat their own creations so?

The Residents probably did more than anyone to bring about the 'legendary' status of the original recordings. To their credit, it lives up to the hype. Yet by denying it an official release they're also denying an important part of their own makeup. So if you're reading, eyeballed ones, go on - make an honest listener of me, and release *The Warner Bros Album* today.

ROBERT DUBALINA

http://www.theresidents.co.uk/history/factreorg.htm

GUITAR MUSIC ◈



Lee Ranaldo

Music for Stage and Screen

FRANCE LES DISQUES DU SOLEIL ET DE L'ACIER DSA54085 CD (2004)

A tasty little disc from the 'talented one' out of Sonic Youth, here wearing a skeleton suit and playing his 'black guitar' in distinguished company of guests musos Alan Licht, Christian Marclay, Günter Müller and William Hooker. At least two of those guys also joined him for last year's Text Of Light project, but where that was inspired by the underground films of Stan Brakhage, these works are direct commissions for assorted film and theatre projects by various obscure directors in Italy and the US. It sounds as though they were mostly pretty macabre ones at that, associated with the occult (*American Magic*), black magic (*The Demons*), and the life and times of Gilles De Rais (*Barbablu*), everyone's favourite child-murdering legend. Accordingly, the music edges towards a Saturnine caste, in places verging on the gothic; the guitar strums are dreary and defeated, each pluck of the plectrum produced by the palsied hand of one haunted. Nasty whirrs, whines and buzzes accompany these lurid licks.

Some of the same 'musical cues' are repeated across these cuts, a lot of which are very short (on average about a minute in length), although this may be more to do with the way music is used and re-used in films. On the other hand, even the pieces for unrelated projects all seem to start on the same note, droning on miserably in the same benighted key. They are also for the most part quite shapeless, just drifting in and out; the editor of the disc has done a good job in getting all the material to cohere. Performances are deliberately quite drab and drained of the attack-energy of Text Of Light. Admittedly, the lengthy 'Sciatov Assassins' has more uplift, mainly due to the energised drumming of Hooker; this track in particular takes us back to the very dawn of that aimless, spiky, post-post-punk sound of 1985 that seems so unique to the mean streets of NYC. Those cuts with added samples and turntabling from Marclay, eg 'Secret Meeting' and 'Spider', provide some relief from the overall gloomy caste. And tune into 'The End of It' if you need to hear edited highlights from the apocalypse, delivered in just two short howling minutes.

A fine open-ended soundtrack to your nightmares, at best; use it to work your way through a bad mood. At worst, flabby and self-indulgent sketching by musicians operating on half-speed. Still preferable by far to any recent Sonic Youth recording.

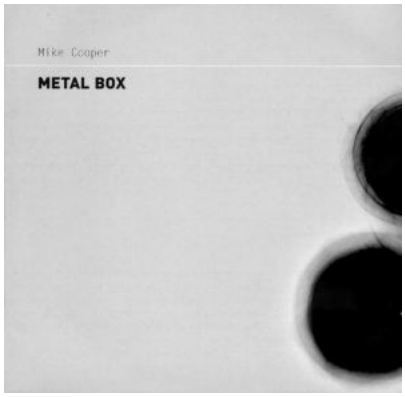
ED PINSENT 18/07/2005
www.dsa-wave.com

Mike Cooper

Metal Box

ITALY ROSSBIN RS020 CD (2005)

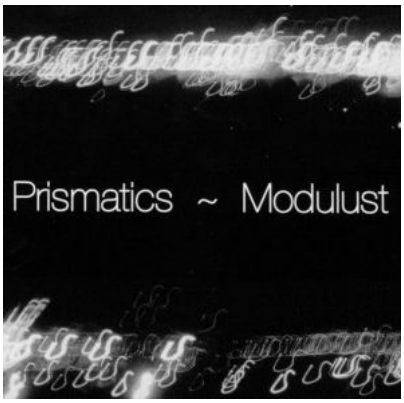
A very nice avant guitar record with a blues theme – six tracks in 30 minutes. Cooper admits upfront to a strong affection for the recorded output of John Fahey; there sure is a lot of that around, but it all adds to the case to be made for lifting Fahey out of that acoustic folk-music box he's been pigeonholed into, especially when a veteran composer-performer like Cooper takes note. Cooper's been at it for 40 years, starting out as a folk-blues singer and over the years finding it convenient to diversify productively as any 19th century magnate. Here he is playing a vintage 1920s National Steel resonator guitar, taking his own live performances and re-editing them into compositions by means of sampling and studio processing. Would be interesting to compare this record with the one by Uncle Woody Sullender this issue (see Phantom of Liberty section). Maybe also to a recent release by Bruce Russell which is currently available, but I can't bring myself to even approach the latter, which is incredibly pretentious and infuriating. If interested, it's called *Midnight Crossroad Tape Recorder Blues*.



Cooper's record is very strong, robust and has a great sound. He mixes bluesy licks and slide guitar effects with digital noise, a strong clash of early and modern recorded sounds. On the opening cut he's joined by Tim Catlin, the Australian experimenter who's also worked with prepared guitar to produce long drone pieces. The more you listen though, the more assured you are that Cooper is a real rockin' man, not merely some intellectual artiste – just think if he'd been in The Magic Band after 1980! He might even have assisted Don Vliet's transition into the digital recording age. Surely the Captain would have loved a title like 'The Rusty Chain Tango Mambo'. I know I do.

Mostly recorded in Rome in 2004, all of these performances are assured and powerful, and the processing work actually improves things – it enhances the sound quality and transports the interest-level and listening value into even higher realms. 'A Big Wave Event' is particularly tremendous – the sound is radically transformed, almost to the extent of reinventing the guitar, as bottleneck slides metamorph into weird, unearthly wails. 'A remote forgotten chord' is the most disjunctive and bitty on the disc, testament to a 'choppy' hour in the editing suite that day. 'Intuitive Acoustic Archaeology' is a little sketchy in comparison, but 'Last Chants and Dance for Blind Joe Death' (an obvious Fahey tribute) is brilliant – a sharp, dynamic, cluttering workout, with a very pessimistic caste. A bag of apocalyptic gloom in your lunch pail! I'm sure when Jim O'Rourke was making his Gastr del Sol records he thought he sounded this good. He wishes. The 20th release on Rossbin, the only Italian label that remains true to the pioneer spirit of Romulus and Remus (their motto: 'The Wolf Goes from Strength to Strength!'). Mike Cooper's appeared on 60 records in his lifetime. Now's your chance to hear at least one of them.

ED PINSENT 19/08/2005
www.rossbin.com



Prismatics
Modulust
USA BIRDS GO SOUTH RECORDS BGS-2005 CD (2004)

Great duo playing here from a couple of American fellows. Joseph Campbell wields the guitar, Mike Shoun plays drums, drum machine, and does live electronics. Together they are capable of generating a spare and mean brooding experience, fit for breeding foul and anti-social thoughts deep in the compost-heap of the mind. Their performances have great assurance and economy, there's no falling back on special effects, and they seem to have already evolved a good working method that suits them both and is capable of sustaining long workouts. The guitar can fly freely into soaring, near-psychedelic passages, while the rhythm section remains on constant alert. There's added variety from the robotic, treated vocals on 'Sole Survivor', and the slide guitar howls on 'Horizon Surrendered'. You may even detect a slight dub influence in the lean, stripped-back style of their approach. 'Maxim' has the much-vaunted 'helicopter overhead' sound effect which only adds to the feeling of paranoia.

Seething with tension, each track is taught and wiry; not quite sure how they manage to convey this aura of silent menace, but at times they come across like two psychopaths in a mental ward, staring you out. Where Lightning Bolt are just insanely loose and demonic, this tight-assed duo are stern, rigid-lipped mechanics, getting the job done with machine-like efficiency and gusto. Yep, it's a man's life in the Prismatics army, that's for sure. The duo, from San Francisco and Tennessee, have been evolving their musical craft and rapport since the 1990s, and wish it known that they aren't a improvising duo; everything you hear has been worked on and crafted to reach a state of perfection.

ED PINSENT 18/07/2005
www.birdsgosouthrecords.com

Pumice
Raft
USA LAST VISIBLE DOG LVD062 CD (ND)

This is Stefan Neville, a solo act from Australia who's had at least one release on his own home-made label, now joining the growing numbers of marginal Australian and NZ artistes to be represented on this US label Last Visible Dog. Content of CD is half songs, half instrumentals, all played using basic rock setup of guitars, bass and drums by Mr Pumice, performing in a languid stoner mode. So stoned, he's beyond laid-back – he's been run over by a steamroller, and his flattened carcass plastered halfway up Ayers Rock.

On the instrumentals, of which the opening cut is among the strongest, he seems to aiming for a rough-edged low-rent Fushitsusha effect, with his heavily de-natured and gently distorted guitars, his lumbering rhythms, and his sparing use of echo. All the surface trappings of Haino's sound, with none of the enigmatic posturing. Somewhere around second track, I became aware that he also considers himself a songwriter; as he sings, harsh syllables are barked out through greasy lips into a cheap mic, a device that crumples instantly in the face of these oddball utterances. As will your poor ears, trying to decipher his illiterate Antipodean grunts. This just naturally invites the Jandek and Gerald Hawk comparisons. Lo-fi loner-stoner home-recorded fuzz vibe abounds, and barely a single muttered lyric is decipherable, notwithstanding a thick coating of ramshackle

guitar playing. Imagine watching old super 8m footage upside-down, through a thick sheet of orange glass. These fragmentary songs depict an unknowable world, mainly because it's shaped by the contours of Pumice's loopy brain, and are firm evidence of some form of mild dementia.

In all, the distancing and distortion effect enhance the dream-like feeling, but also the sense of introversion and closed-in-ness. Like spending a few hours in some desolate shack in the outback, not that that's intended as a comment on Neville's lifestyle, or the condition of his mental health. Home recording will never die. Of interest.

ED PINSENT 09/07/2005
www.lastvisibledog.com

My Cat Is An Alien
When the Windmill's Whirl Dies
USA ECLIPSE RECORDS ECL-040 VINYL LP (2004)

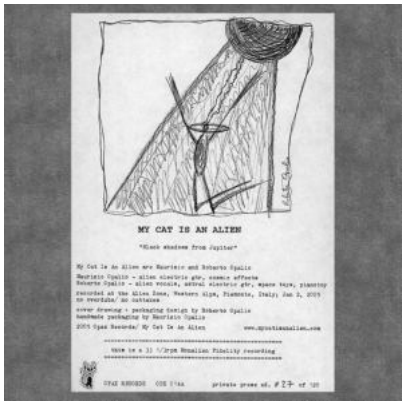
Our prolific Italian brothers turn in another side-long workout on the A side of this recent LP – the title track being a Roberto Opalio poem, whose text is whispered in hushed tones over an ethereal guitar/instrumental drone. The poem mourns

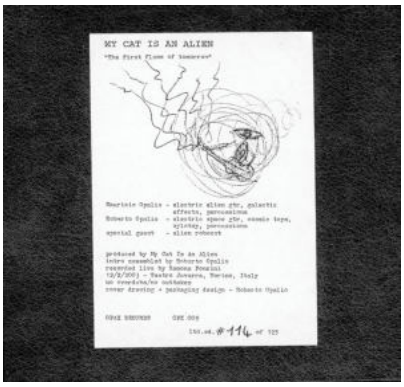
the loss of light on earth and an attempt to deal with the onset of darkness. Following a near-classical poem form, the piece starts with a simple sunset on a Saturday evening, but becomes universal as it grows into a sunset of cosmic proportions, leaving the earth adrift and covered in 'dark shadows'. A sad lamentation on the state of the poet becomes a grim verdict on the fate of the universe; there's pathetic fallacy for you! I'm starting to figure out this aspect of My Cat; they're like Romanticists, painting cosmic fantasies and disasters that correspond to inner emotional or psychological states. Think of Samuel Palmer, William Blake and John Martin. The music supporting said 'dark shadows' comprises subtle guitar plucks, tape loops, and a bass drum keeping time for this solemn march into darkness; it slowly transforms itself into something quite beautiful, a deep and intense elegy as the last rays of the sun disappear. Two long instrumentals on the B side are 'Perception of Time' and 'Fallin''. Slow cosmic workouts both, the first with a guitar sound that recalls the memory of the *Forbidden Planet* soundtrack, the second full of Ash Ra Tempel-styled space-exploration soloing.

ED PINSENT 28/08/2005
www.eclipse-records.com

My Cat Is An Alien
Black Shades From Jupiter
ITALY OPAX RECORDS OPX 014A LP (2005)

Further slow grinding drones and guitar galaxy-scapes from the Opalio brothers. This later phase of theirs is like slow Kosmische noodling, aspiring to the condition of The Cosmic Jokers without the aid of drumming. The A side seems to depict another rainy day

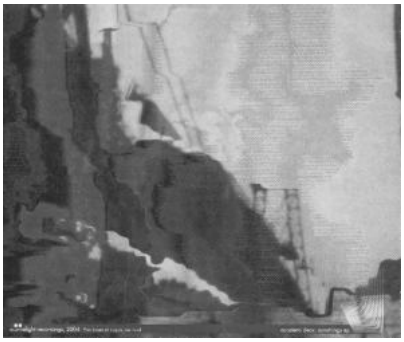




out by Coddington's Nebula, while the B side is slightly more melodic with its slow two-chord figure, enhanced by phasing and other effects. Recorded in January 2005, private press LP in sturdy art cover, 120 copies only.

ED PINSENT 03/09/205
www.mycatisanalien.com

Also available: *The first flame of tomorrow* (ITALY OPAX RECORDS OPX 009 CDR), an hour-long single instrumental, recorded in February 2003.



Accelera Deck
Sunstrings EP
USA SCARCELIGHT RECORDINGS SLR33 CD (2004)

Excellent release by Mr Deck (ie Chris Jeely, USA), of which 'Dross' and the title track are particularly strong. All sounds are derived from his big red guitar and scads of dirty grey feedback; the guitar work has been 'digitally clipped'. Well, I'll buy this man a new pair of nailclippers any day. If we must continue to feature electronic music in this magazine, let it all be as obnoxious, chaotic and abrasive as 'Dross', a lovely powerful noise! Recalls the glory days of Peter Rehberg and the enthusiastic manner in which he too laid waste to obsolete ideas - like common sense, good taste and restraint - by ferocious manipulation of his oversized sound files. In like manner, 'Dross' is a wild, forward-moving onrush of uncontrollable unpleasantness, a roller-coaster ride through the sewers of Hong Kong. There are way too many textures piled on, too much to listen to, and everything is completely unnatural' it's a big sweet deep-frozen layer cake made entirely of E-numbers. Unlike Merzbow, Jeely doesn't use a driving pulse to propel the work, but instead lays out a series of contrived 'events' which could not possibly happen in real musical time. Perhaps this is one way to maximise the potential of computer music; make your laptop do impossible things.

Not all of his music comes roaring out in attack mode. For 'Sunstrings', the armour plating is removed, and he opens his heart to sing out a full-bodied, 100% proof one-chord drone of roaring bliss. It's a steady, unblinking multi-tracked guitar anthem which is impossible to resist; the kind of music that can empower listeners, not bludgeon them into submission. The only slight disappointment is the ending to the EP, which comprises a short bit of nothingness called '777', and a hidden track of minimal cuts and clicks which is utterly undistinguished. But the first two cuts are worth your pennies. Arrives in a plain red sleeve, as hot as the sun's core.

ED PINSENT 17/07/2005
http://scarcelight.org

Accelera Deck
Pop Polling
USA SCARCELIGHT RECORDINGS SLR39 CD (2005)

Other release by Chris Jeely this issue. Not a noise record but instead tasteful electronic and guitar glorp, apparently informed by an understanding of pop song structure and indicating a 'penchant for melody'. I found it boring; 10 tracks of pleasant but inessential 4-track noodling.

ED PINSENT 31/07/2005
http://scarcelight.org

Giuseppe Ielasi
Gesine
SWEDEN HÄPNA H.21 CD (2005)

A reasonable enough musical effort by Italian experimenter Ielasi, who has made an Erstwhile record (2001's *Right After*) in tandem with Domenico Scianjo, and it's another example of soft-centred instrumental 'tastefulness' that this Swedish label seems to specialise in. Ielasi uses guitars mostly, strumming them languidly along with some low-key and unobtrusive electronic droning, layering everything he does in sonic studio constructs which resemble suspended 'floats', or musical equivalents of Alexander Calder mobiles. In this, and his slow lugubrious pace, he's not far away from Polwechsel, Burkhard Stangl, et al. He adds some uncertain field-recording assemblages on track 2, some meandering percussion layers on track 3, and plunky guitar with other instruments played in a very fidgety fashion on track 4. The guitar techniques derive partially from folk music (or at least his understanding of it). He makes a pleasing sound, but it has no direction. The formlessness gets irritating quickly. The CD features the classic 'raw chicken on the radiator' photo. Actually I'm not sure how classic it is, but I do know that's no way to cook a chicken. And if you're into the semiology of CD covers, the music within this one is similarly half-baked.

ED PINSENT 23/07/2005
www.hapna.com

Seht
The Voice of the Taniwha
USA LAST VISIBLE DOG LVD057 CD (2003)

Seht's record is a pleasing combination of field recordings and low-key instrumental music, an approach which has also been done by AM (Antony Milton) and one or two Lucky Kitchen composers. Somehow I'm not surprised that Seht is also from New Zealand, although he uses far more voices than AM. Very mysterious voices, which when combined with the random samples and amateurish, unaccomplished acoustic guitar playing, create a fairly unusual effect along with the intimacy of the whole set. The 'Requiem for John Fahey' is a substantial and fairly accomplished piece; it pitches a crisply-recorded steel-string acoustic guitar against unobtrusive field recordings, and a nice home-made drone. By imitating the techniques he's perceived on Fahey records, Seht hopes perhaps to deliver himself of a warm tribute to the man, though who can come close to Fahey's guitar skills, depth of musical knowledge, and imaginatively radical approach to making records? Not Seht, that's for sure; the rest of the CD is bitty and patchy. The insert briefly documents what he was doing with these home experiments, recorded 1998-2001 and mixed in 2003. Not unpleasant, but a mildly inconclusive home recording with a vaguely pastoral feel.

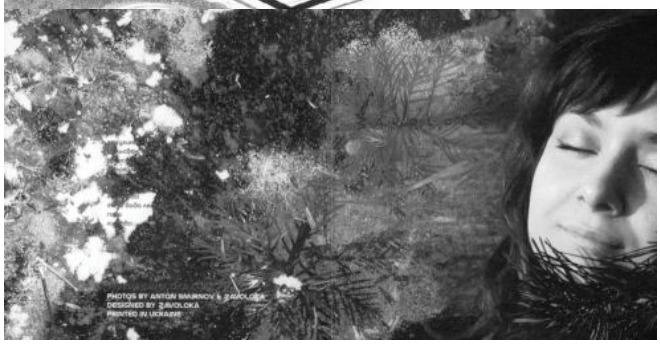
ED PINSENT 11/07/2005
www.lastvisibledog.com

✸✸ This Woman's Work

Zavoloka
Suspenzia
UKRAINE NEXSOUND ns17
e CD (2005)

Impressive solo work by Katja Zavoloka, a strikingly talented young musician from Kiev (she did this one aged 24). 7 shortish pieces of electronics on this disc, overlapping to form a lengthy statement of sorts, and one that originally existed as a frequently-downloaded MP3 in 2003, achieving a high profile amongst those cognoscenti who can get to this stuff. These are all extremely interesting electronic and electro-acoustic constructions, using elements like voice recordings, loud noise, looped and repeated elements, and strange rhythms. Her principal strength lies in the distinctly eccentric way she orders her material. The structures are very unusual, with many unexpected developments – as you take the guided tour around her mysterious labyrinth, you really don't know what kind of electric shock you might get around the next corner. Zavoloka remains wide-awake for just about every second, never leaving a single second to chance or letting the machines take over for her. There are elements of dub mixing and what I would identify as a species of dancefloor-influenced avant electronics, all approached with intelligence and skill. Another strong point is her very crisp sound – makes you realise how tedious it is to endure muddy, unfocussed electronica – the whole CD is sharp and clear, with each sonic element defined and separated out, creating a crystalline 'craggy' texture that you can almost touch with your fingertips. In the end even if I don't think this work is 'about' anything, other than composer having a fun time creating sounds that excite and interest her, it's still of interest. It's extremely abstract and the only agenda seems to be sound for its own sake. Most excellent, a lot of heart and brain-power in this one.

ED PINSENT 23/07/2005



Zavoloka
Plavyna
UKRAINE NEXSOUND ns37
/ LATON 032 CD (2005)

A further ten tracks of totally crackers, abstract electronica on this disc – maybe even more far-out than the previous CD! Bold and assertive sounds leap forth, and announce their undeniable presence with all the gusto of a leaping Cossack, slapping you round the face with his lengthy beard while executing a lively reel on the Steppes. Zavoloka's striking use of dynamics means her work sits somewhere either side of experimental electronic music and the disco dance-floor. Maybe she operates happily in the twilight zone. There's no way something so lively could have come out of the sacred confines of Pierre Schaeffer's stronghold, nor could something with such intelligence emerge from the tyrannical realms of the do-or-die nightclub. Maybe this means the democratisation of modern music can sometimes pay off!

At first listen, this is a very confusing, fast-moving, bitstream-styled rush of noise, with plenty of crunch and reverbed fizz to add fibre to the crackle-attack. Zavoloka's imagination is on full at all times, as she throws in lots of ingenious interruptions to the flow, yet still maintains a steady course and turns in work of total coherence. True, it may sometimes lapse into slightly more familiar click-and-cut methods and conventional results, but this does not detract on jot from the exciting texture of her entire tapestry. Apparently this release is 'inspired a lot by ethnic culture of Ciscarpathian reign of Ukraine'. Yet to understand how she's transformed said culture into the animated marks on this colourful canvas, you'd have to climb inside her brain and observe the birds coming home to roost.

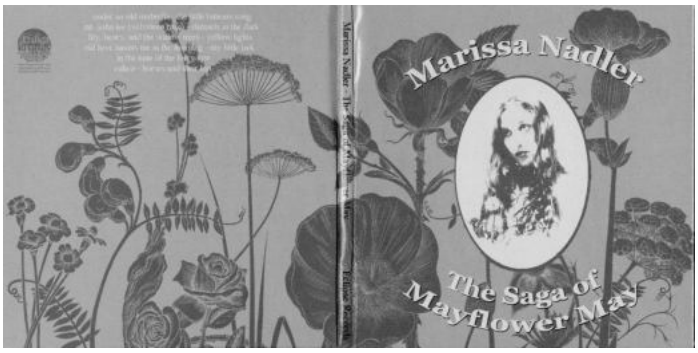
Which isn't to say I think she's a bird-brain. In fact, it may be possible to understand people in terms of their tree-like qualities, and arrive at some form of comprehension by scaling their trunks. She's no weeping willow; the cover for this CD shows Ms Zavoloka clearly 'at one' with conifers and roots, suggesting she might actually be a pine or fir tree. The titles of these ten cuts include some references to the bounty produced from her lofty branches, such as 'Painted Berries' and 'Little Flower', and to the healthy environs where she has anchored deep her roots, such as 'Cold Water Flowing' and 'Mountain'. However, these index points may be deceptive and *Plavyna* may be a single continuous flow of musical noise arbitrarily divided for convenience. A real corker of a disc, highly entertaining.

ED PINSENT 21/08/2005
www.nexsound.org
www.zavoloka.com

Marissa Nadler
Ballads of Living and Dying
USA ECLIPSE RECORDS
NO NUMBER CD (2004)
Marissa Nadler
The Saga of Mayflower May
USA ECLIPSE RECORDS
NO NUMBER CD (2005)

With these two albums Marissa Nadler establishes herself as a gifted, utterly distinctive folk talent. Both records are full of beautifully wrought ballads, delivered in a sumptuous mezzo-soprano voice and accompanied by sparkling, fluent acoustic guitar.

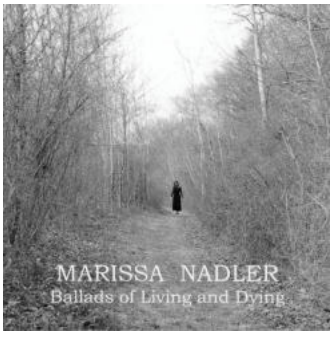
On her 2004 debut, *Ballads of Living and Dying*, Nadler delivers on the stark promise of the album's title. Playing guitar in the richly resonant picking style of Bert Jansch and Martin Carthy, she sings as if from a haunted netherworld. With eight of the ten tracks being self-penned, Nadler draws on seemingly limitless reserves of darkly potent imagery to create ballads of vast depth and eloquence. It's a measure of her lyrical skill that the closing 'Annabelle



Lee', a setting of a poem by Edgar Allan Poe, seems entirely of a piece with her own texts. ('Hay Tantos Muertos', a setting of a poem by Pablo Neruda, must remain a mystery to a non-Spanish speaker like myself.) Death, sex and lost or thwarted love are recurrent themes, from the tragic keening of 'Box of Cedar' to the desolate eroticism of 'Bird Song': 'You said my name so sweetly / That I took my clothes all off… / The birds are calling, and I do not believe for me'.

Throughout these ten short, passionate ballads, Nadler instinctively knows when to foreground her voice and when to let the guitar speak for her. Bathed in unearthly reverb, her ethereal voice frequently gives way to ominous finger picking. Currents of strangeness wander among the songs in the form of floating electric guitar and accordion. On 'Days of Rum', meanwhile, Nadler trades guitar for banjo, sounding for all the world like a time traveller from Harry Smith's *Anthology* as she intones the spectral tale of a girl who 'was young and yearned to die'. Even when the guitar shifts to more relaxed major-chord strumming on 'Mayflower May' and 'Virginia', the lyrics remain defiantly sepulchral: 'The waves rush against my face as I start to drown…'

Nadler's 2005 follow-up, *The Saga of Mayflower May*, makes occasional glancing lyrical references to her first album, reinforcing the sense that the singer inhabits a hermetic, spiritually enclosed realm. Housed in a gorgeous miniature gatefold sleeve, the album extends and deepens its



predecessor's concerns in eleven further outpourings of intense, supernatural balladry. This time the Hammond organ lends its radiant timbre to three tracks, including the delightful 'Yellow Lights', whose softly strummed backing provides the setting for a mandala of colours – blue water, green grass, red rubies.

The album feels like a visitation from a parallel earth where the mythical has become the everyday, populated by damsels, gypsies and river children. If that sounds unbearably twee, then listen to the way Nadler's filigree guitar, directly descended from Leonard Cohen's classic 70s work, swoops and glides around lines like 'Photographs of your face against the rain / I'm gonna burn them all and bury your name' ('Damsels In The Dark').

These are the kinds of records you find yourself returning to again and again, drawn by the dark pastoralism of Nadler's texts and the dangerous yet irresistible pull of her guitar and voice. Recommended without reservation.

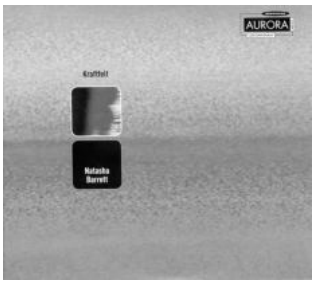
RICHARD REES JONES
www.eclipse-records.com
www.marissanadler.com

Natasha Barrett
Kraftfelt
NORWAY AURORA ACD 5037 CD + DVD (2005)

Despite rather banal cover artworks, there are some strong electro-acoustic compositions herein. Barrett was born in the UK and studied here too, but she is currently resident in Oslo, hence release of this set on a Norwegian label endorsed and sponsored with their equivalent of arts council funding. Having secured her masters degree at Birmingham studying with the great Jonty Harrison, she went on to work with the Birmingham Electro-acoustic Theatre, and secured a further academic award working under the equally great Denis Smalley. Then it's off to Norway where she obtained a residency at NOTAM. Since then, she's had releases on empreintes DIGITALes (the Canadian label that specialises in modern electro-acoustic works) and has been awarded various tasty European commissions.

Certainly this package promises plenty in the way of high-tech listening thrills. The three long pieces on this double CD set are presented in normal stereo on one disc, and then again on another disc in 5:1 SurroundSound for your DVD player; she composed it with the latter playback environment in mind. The first cut, '...fetters…' didn't do a lot for me – it's long, it's breathy, and filled with garbled voices, and long swishing noises suggestive of desolate icy wastes. Pretty good, but not strikingly original either. It's something to do with the laws of physics and how molecules behave inside an enclosure. To illustrate this notion, Barrett uses readings from the old Norse Edda myths, some field recordings captured in a London East End fruit market, and the voice of Kristin Norderval – she who also sings in the US duo Zanana. Certainly hearing all these disparate layers piled together simultaneously can be pretty striking, but the scientific dimension eludes me…

I'm much more at home with 'Prince Prospero's Party', because it has a macabre tone and because it's her most narrative piece. I favour the macabre. I also like stories, but Barrett apparently feels compelled to apologise for working with narrative in the context of high-brow, abstracted sound art. Why? This one's great! It's based on the Edgar Allen Poe story 'The Masque of the Red Death' and uses narrative trajectory of said tale as a musical structure. To put it more plainly, it tells the story in sound. The piece is structured to lead us through the seven rooms of the Prince's chambers, illustrating the inevitable march of the smug party-goers towards their deaths, using snatches of documentary sound and highly-processed recordings. The 'room' thing is always popular with electro-acoustic composers – just think of *Babel* by Roger Doyle, that monumental work we reviewed in issue 9, where he made a big deal out of exploring the acoustical resonances of imaginary sonic room spaces, until you wanted to throw up. The good thing about Barrett is that she doesn't succumb to realising a corny film soundtrack type thing – instead it's packed with ambiguity, lots of textures and layers, and too much happening for the ears to process. She arrives at quite a surreal result, leading to the climax of terror with a very effective clock chime sound which signals the fatal ending.



And so we sit back to enjoy 'Exploration Invisibilis', a 27-minute imaginary voyage through time and space. Her textual explanation for this one is a bit flakey – she burbles on about 'carrying you on your own 30-minute voyage through an energy-filled landscape of implication, sound and silence' – but there is much imagination and intelligence packed into the structure of this one. Although not as ambitious as either, it puts one in mind of *Hymnen* or *De Natura Sonoris*, so lovers of those two meisterworks should check this out. It's mostly pretty abstract, with its dense, swishing and rushing textures suggesting continual forward movement, although some narrative fragments do leak in – at one point, it's clear we're on board a plane or inside an airport. Now at this point you may think I'm simply describing 'On The Run' from that god-awful pretentious Pink Floyd LP *The Dark Side of My Trousers*, but the difference is worlds apart. The Floyd's work is juvenile, based on point-to-point linear narration, using the most trite sounds imaginable (despite assistance on VCS3 from Delia Derbyshire) and making crushingly banal observations on the state of the world. Barrett, by contrast, uses her intelligence and intuition in equal amounts on her voyage. Her structure is layered and vertical, not linear; she is not interested in using random dynamics just for their own sake. Rather, she has thought carefully about how to draw out significant relationships, based on timbre and sound. In this way, Barrett makes many unexpected connections between sounds, and thus between ideas and things. Listening to this will stimulate your brain in like manner.

ED PINSENT 14/07/2005
http://www.notam02.no/~natashab/
aurora@grappa.no

Lovely Midget
North Head
USA FAMILY VINEYARD FV24 CD (2003)

Good stuff here. A solo turn by Rachel Shearer, arriving from New Zealand, part of an underground scene there with the bands Angelhead and Queen Meanie Puss. She surfaced in the USA with a vinyl 10-incher on Ecstatic Peace in 1996; this CD is on the USA label Family Vineyard, comes with seven short cuts of sound and one video. Shearer does most of the playing herself, working keyboards, guitars, flutes and vocals; and she adds in layers of field recordings too (as so many do these days). While at first this record struck me as a bit aimless and possibly one that might end up hampered by its thin, bodiless sound, it actually has a lot of value and there is much activity going on beneath the fragile, ethereal surface.

On 'North Head', an ordinary guitar and keyboard drone is livened up with an odd recording of girls' voices, creating a rather surreal effect. 'Squall' comprises a robust reprocessing of growly digital sounds, to suggest a distant rainstorm. Weather and landscapes...that's her New Zealand background for you. Not much force to 'Squall' despite intended stormy feeling, just a short ride across a vaguely unsettled and choppy sea. 'Fading' is a good mixed organ drone, with gentle tones from a gentle flute, plus echoed guitar lines all put together in wafer-thin layers; no small studio craft here, to create a miniature version of Tangerine

Dream.

'Heavy Weather' is further evidence of a preoccupation with storm and environment sound-painting. As before, no real anger is to be found in Shearer's view of stormy weather; she ain't the painter John Martin, that's for sure! This track has a good grumbling bass guitar and some slightly chaotic elements thrown in; Sean O'Reilly adds guitar to this atmospheric episode. 'Raudive Rain' is another weather picture, and has a good 'enveloping' sound. The droning noises are stacked up in translucent washes, removing the tonal centre from the music and delivering that magical floating effect. May also have some added field recordings in it; 'Raudive Rain' is one of the most effective tracks on disc, and succeeds in transcending the digital methodology used to realise it.

Equally excellent is 'Swollen Dusk', showing us that varying times of day are also important to this sound-painter, who is now starting to resemble W M Turner or perhaps Claude Monet. This track is full of guitars and queasy sounds, and may start off a tad too tasteful but soon acquires a vaguely threatened tone as it enters a twilit state. Clearly one whose entire body and soul is very sensitive to atmospheric change, Lovely Midget is human litmus paper. 'Dolphin' is a song by Linda Perhacs, a near-forgotten US folk singer who made a great record in 1970 (since reissued). Lovely Midget's version uses 4-track recording and a distorted guitar sound reminiscent of Pumice; her voice is just one more component in the mix, making it less of a song than an intriguing construct.

ED PINSENT 24/07/2005
www.family-vineyard.com

bLevin bLectum
Magic Maple
USA PRAEMEDIA
praecdb01 CD (2004)

Genre-wise, this slippery little beast is proving tricky to pigeon-hole, which is probably as it should be, but early spins had me grasping for some reference point. Best I could come up with was to situate it between the zany sampladelica of Wobbly/PLU and the chaotic home-made noise of Thomas Dimuzio, who mastered the CD. I have heard of Blevin Blectum before (perhaps in context of her band, Blectum from Blechdom) and assumed I wouldn't like her work for some reason, but actually this CD isn't half bad. Described as 'prog-rock fantasy gone horribly awry', it's an off-beat entertainment and was assembled in her studio in Oakland California in 2004. It's all extremely odd electronica, sampler and glitch stuff for the most part, with determinedly obstinate beats (sometimes) and very awkward song structure arrangements (almost always). I don't think any of this is improvised; I guess it's been worked on for a long time, and considerable care and effort has been poured into making it all seem totally spontaneous and continuous, as though everything popped out fully-formed the second Blevin Blectum turned on her Casio that morning. Of course, it's also incredibly mannered and contrived as heck, but so what?

There seems to be some effort on her part to present the audience with information that's been slightly scrambled – in the words and titles that don't quite make sense as you read them, and in the elaborate tune structures that keep you guessing constantly. Anyone who has ever heard a pop song made after 1960 will be baffled by these clever arrangements; it's as if they're trying to wrong-foot you every other minute. Some may find this strategy intrusive, not to say pretentious. In fact I think Blevin Blectum may be trying to call attention to something else, maybe whatever it is that falls between the two stools across which she so elegantly stretches herself.

As listener, you'll have to do a little extra decoding along with some hard-working listening; nothing wrong with that. One good place to start is with the four-part 'Pelican' suite, which is particularly exhilarating. The instruments are almost spinning out of control, poised in a nice place between control and chaos. I'm bemused and bewildered, both good things. She would probably make some very good commercial pop records (perhaps with 1980s veterans Lene Lovich or Toni Basil on vocals), if she put her mind to it.

ED PINSENT 27/07/2005
www.praemedia.com

Zanana
Holding Patterns
USA DEEP LISTENING DL-30-2005 CD CD (2005)

This particular combo is a duo of Monique Buzzarté who plays the trombone, and Kriston Norderval who is a vocalist; and they're both into real-time processing of their respective sounds using their Apple Macs and sonic software. The name Zanana is their corruption of the word 'zenana', meaning in Asian cultures that part of the house where only women may go. This probably has most resonance in those countries where a patriarchal model still holds sway, but the point is well taken. These two women met during a 'peace vigil', probably in the wake of the terrorist attacks on their home country (and they have something to say on that matter too). Peace camps and the like got a bad press in the UK in the 1980s, when spirited women camped outside Greenham Common to make a long-term protest against that particular US military base in England, and Thatcher's Trident programme generally. The tabloid press took a dim view. To undermine them, the best they could come up with was to suggest in print that all the women in the camp were lesbians. Deviancy from the mainstream of opinion was equated with sexual deviancy – more precisely, that which the denizens of Fleet Street deemed to be sexual deviancy. Some 25 years on, who's to say we live in more enlightened times?

This music is pretty good, although it is deeply solemn and a tad earnest in presenting its high-minded pretensions. The sadness of it hits you first. Americans seem capable of doing this without fear of making fools of themselves; most English people would be too embarrassed. Using techniques of free improvisation, structured improvisation, and semi-composed scores, they issue forth slow processional tones from trombone and vox, aided with a fair bit of natural (and digitally enhanced) echo. The echo sometimes comes from the venues they performed it in – old buildings, presumably with very high ceilings. As noted, the Apple Macs were also used for live, real-time processing. In places, it could almost be a dramatic film score. An extremely melancholic sound washes over you; heartfelt cries for the sorrows of the world.

Barbara Barg, though not on the record in person, is a poetess who contributed the text of 'Flags', a poem which is half-sung and half-recited by Norderval against the instrumental backdrop, and is a thinly-veiled post 9/11 lament, full of poignant symbols. I can't point to anything specific in the words, but Barg clearly means to say it's all the fault of men. It may be true that if women were in charge of things, they wouldn't wage wars. Barg states 'it is the duty of my heart to sing', pinning her faith on the responsibility of the artist to get on with the job in troubled times. This has a faint smugness which translates onto the record and can get on your nerves after a while, as can the insistency of the voice when it gets stuck in some 'interactive' loop system, but the trombone has authority and confidence. I had it in mind to discuss further two aspects suggested by this record: (1) healing the damage done after warfare and (2) women 'sounding' out the spaces of an empty building, which assumes proportions of a womb. But those are essay questions. Maybe better if you buy this record for yourself, have a listen, and get back to me with your 1000 word replies.

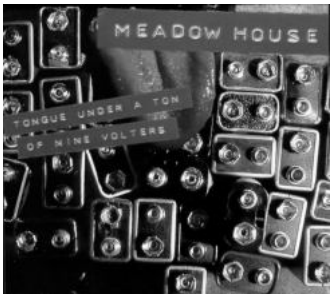
ED PINSENT 10/07/2005
www.deeplistening.org

Emily Hay
Like Minds
USA pfMENTUM CD022 CD (2005)

Twelve tracks of acoustic improvised music, in various group combinations, led by this USA flute and piccolo player and vocalist. I've tried to get myself to like this, but it's far too tasteful for me, and even pretty corny in places. Hay's flute playing itself, which is featured pretty heavily, is one big problem – it's far too florid, filled with lots of grace-notes, and enhanced with studio echo; all of this means that at worst she sounds like she's been sampled from a Les Baxter Exotica LP. I like Les Baxter, but suspect Hay's intentions are far more 'serious'. The second difficulty is her wordless vocalising, which is really very ropey indeed; her attempts at proper singing even worse. Hay is joined by numerous skilled players, and the instrumentation – which includes percussion, violins, cellos, guitars, acoustic bass and pianos – means that there's certainly a lot of musical variety on offer. And everything was performed live, with no overdubbing...yet despite all the improvising going on here, it's odd how formal and stiff everything sounds; more like a form of classical music than anything to have emerged from the workshops of Company Week. Hay has zero 'jazz spirit' in her musical soul and probably arrived at this point via the conservatoire route rather than by following Ornette Coleman. We should at least be grateful she spares us any interpretations or long-winded explanations of her work, although you can learn a lot from her track titles. 'A year and two weeks' and 'Waiting for Sara' both sound like the titles of movies you'd go out of your way to avoid; while the wackier ones, like 'Boiled Cadillac' and 'Crooked Hopscotch' are examples of American humour that doesn't really travel. Not a bad effort, but somehow too poised to really move me.

ED PINSENT 21/08/2005
www.pfMentum.com
www.emilyhay.com

SONGS



Meadow House
Tongue Under a Ton of Nine Volters
UK ALCOHOL ALDW1CD CD (2005)

This CD, despite the collective moniker that it bears, is in fact the work, or rather childlike play of entirely one man, musician and poet Dan Wilson. Between December 2003 and March 2004, Wilson was responsible for one of the more bizarre instalments to be committed to the archives of radio with his 'The Exciting Hellebore Shew' on London's own excellent Resonance FM. This is first full length foray into recording, and is intended in some way at being a summation of that shows own brand of oddball lunacy and schizophrenic approach to what makes for pleasurable listening.

Here of course things are slightly more coherent, the album being entirely comprised of regular songs, even if they bear little resemblance to anything you have heard before. Wilson makes use of all manner of regular instruments (from both East and West apparently), children's toys, recordings and anything else he can lay his grubby hands on to hit or scrape or generally cause a racket with. The obvious parallel, already mentioned elsewhere, is probably Syd Barrett, and indeed there is something decidedly English Prog about the album. One or two tracks bring to mind, for better or worse an English Beck, but I also think he has more than a little of the Chris Knox about him in his overtly lo-fi, stream-of-consciousness take on matters.

All the deliberate craziness without respite does become a little tiresome for these ears toward the end. One can only imagine what it is like to live with the man. At a remarkably young age he seems to have digested all the lessons of pop, and now seems to be regurgitating it through his own demented, idiosyncratic filter. Think of Paul McCartney gone horribly, horribly wrong. Wilson has previously had the honour of having a track appear on a compilation produced by *The Wire*, so has obviously been spotted early by the establishment. One just hopes that they don't lead him astray from his own unique path.

AARON ROBERTSON
PO Box 556, London, SE5 0RL, UK
cpoductions@britishlibrary.net
http://hellebore.aa.stodge.org

Brendon Anderegg
Falling Air
USA PSYCH-O-PATH CDPSP-009 CD (2005)

Brendon Anderegg's third album is a diverse yet remarkably coherent collection of songs. Deploying a range of strategies from folky singer-songwriter moves to ambient driftworks and raggle-taggle band workouts, Anderegg avoids any charge of dilettantism through a careful accretion of sonic detail and a sure-footed way with a conversational lyric. The results are consistently fresh and appealing, and the album is sure to bolster Anderegg's growing reputation in avant circles.

Atypical for this release, the appropriately titled first track 'The Open' recalls Anderegg's previous albums, *Anomia* and *When Rectangles Roll Under Cities*, with its busy, rattling drones. Shards of light pierce the gloom as the activity builds, and the piece develops through deft layering of sounds and effects. The album's only other instrumental, 'One More Year', is a pleasantly loping arrangement for banjo and percussion.

Elsewhere, Anderegg recalls Brian Eno's early song-based work on tracks like 'Off To The Side' and 'Street Lights'. Anderegg shares something of Eno's undemonstrative vocal delivery, yet his voice is perfectly suited to the deceptively artless phraseology of the latter's lyric: 'Don't go outside, maybe this time you won't wake up / Don't trace your next step, just count the street lights and death toll.' The warning note sounded here is couched in deliciously cool acoustic playing, with trumpet and glockenspiel darting around loose bass and drums. On 'Off To The Side', meanwhile, Anderegg's clipped electric guitar runs mingle with propulsive drumming (courtesy of Jake Morris) and a delectable rhythmic swagger.

Anderegg and his band of accomplished musicians hold the listener's attention throughout with short, perfectly concise musical statements. The formally elegant 'Baby Bird' resembles a waltz, with the warm, soothing tones of the Fender Rhodes and the delicate moves of Jesse Peterson's violin adding to the glowing atmosphere of the track. The folkish manoeuvres of 'Rode, Riding To' and 'What Were You Going For' differ dramatically from the intriguing, mysterious 'The Holes' – the latter consisting of mumbled words, sparse percussion and haunting effects, and little else – yet the contrast makes perfect sense in the context of Anderegg's mastery of these diverse forms. The excellent final track, 'When They Were', draws upon a heightening of recollected detail: 'all the money that we spent buying things, alone in the ocean while the notes shake'. Its smoky sax and forlorn acoustic guitar provide a nostalgic, emotive end to a fine album.

RICHARD REES JONES
www.psych-o-path.com

Dedo
Avatar
SPAIN HRÖNIR GMHLOOK CD (2004)

From Spain comes this very eccentric collection of weird, offbeat songs and recits, rendered with bizarre, deconstructed arrangements and odd treatments. Hard not to like it! It's a Victor Nubla project for the most part, realised with assistance from talented instrumentalist Paul Torres, and the voices of four young guest singers. For all I know they're students of his, or he picked them up off the streets. Nubla plays sampler, clarinet and organ; Torres plays sampler, software, kalimba and guitar. To date, I'm unable to follow the lyrics which are all in Spanish, but I have responded well to the bonkers dynamics of each song, of which the unexpected twists and turns are quite fascinating. In a way this could almost match wits with Tom Waits' *Swordfish Trombones*, although Nubla's life may not have been quite as strange as that of Waits.

The CD is an odd mix of styles. Lounge-jazz, cabaret songs, beats and dance music…none of which are rendered in familiar ways. From one track to the next, we might switch from fairly straight melodic pop-song mode, to semi-formless vocal chattering set against a fizzy, electronic backdrop. One near-ancestor of this might be Solex from the 1990s, although her brand of vocal twittering with sampled records was a one-joke approach which wore thin very quickly. These constructions have more intelligence and depth. Some, like 'El Ciempies', is more like a simple recit than a song. Others use sampled loops to build up a song structure; in much commercial pop music, such processes are used all

the time, but very carefully concealed from the audience in order to make it seem like 'real' playing. Here, part of the agenda is to bring attention to these artifices, lay bare the mechanics, and deliberately leave recorded tracks slightly off-register with each other. This compels you to pay attention, keeps you listening.

Rather hard to pigeon-hole this set of deconstructed modernist pop, especially if you listen to Nubla's other CD in this issue; imagine if Pita Rehberg produced Dido, then you might get something like this. Unfortunately, only the opening tracks have these strengths and interesting idiosyncrasies; the later songs are mostly filler, a lot more ordinary and resembling bland Euro-disco. Still, it's very much worth checking out.

ED PINSENT 10/07/2005
www.hronir.org

Edward Ka-Spel

Pieces of ∞
USA BETA-LACTAM RING RECORDS
mt082a CD (2005)

Over the course of some 60 albums since their 1980 debut, Edward Ka-Spel's Legendary Pink Dots have carved out a unique niche with their quirky blend of electronica and psychedelia. At the same time, Ka-Spel has released around 20 solo albums and numerous side projects. *Pieces of* ∞ is a 2004 addition to this vast body of work. It's a very uneven collection, crying out for the kind of quality control that Ka-Spel, given his prodigious output, would appear reluctant to impose.

The album begins in undistinguished fashion with 'The Writing On The Wall', a laboured mid-tempo plod dominated by wheezing French-style accordion. The vaguely surrealistic lyrics are delivered in a mannered style that is not to my taste but is certainly distinctive. Partway through, the song lurches clumsily into a dramatic, piano-led interlude; unfortunately, it then returns to the dull accordion motif.

'Here Comes The Night' is immensely more satisfying – a dark ambient piece that magically evokes a drifting interstellar journey. Twinkling piano clusters sound like a music box floating endlessly through space, while electronic currents pulsate and a softly intoned chorale adds to the lambent beauty of the track. Here too, though, things go awry towards the end, as the piece morphs inexplicably into a tame electro footstomper.

Both 'Comedown' and 'Alms For Lepers' are routine, blustering synth workouts, the former redeemed by some splendidly disorientating Nurse With Wound-like effects. 'Shanti' sees the return of the accordion, this time not without a certain goofy charm. Ka-Spel goes out on a definite high, however, with the mysteriously titled '8.2 8.3.' Here, bustling analogue textures recall the poppier moments of Throbbing Gristle, until the piece dissolves into a meditative dreamworld that evokes Tangerine Dream at their spaciest. One only wishes that Ka-Spel had reined in the tendency towards the novel and absurd that mars some of the album, and concentrated on the imposing electronica that provides it with its many wonderful moments.

RICHARD REES JONES
www.blrrecords.com

Chris Jones

Lonesome Jonesome
UK 2CASUAL RECORDINGS 2CAS001 CD (2004)

Ah, the exuberance of youth. I can remember it fondly, if a little distantly. Actually living it instead of being a jaded old codger like me is nineteen-year-old Chris Jones, whose debut album this is. It's also something he's financed himself, set up a website to promote, and sent out into the real world to live a life of it's own. So it's understandable that he's a more than a little proud of it. One thing you can't fault the young man on is his enthusiasm. He certainly proves himself to be a good deal more coherent than I was at his age. Who says the youth of today aren't what they used to be?

The album is a stripped-down one man plus acoustic guitar plus troubled soul affair, a recipe that's proved popular over the years for getting to the heart of matters. Jones's picking proves to be quite Fahey-esque in places, with its dark folky blues, but also displays a sense of freedom that suggests some familiarity with the improvisational approach. His love of repetition on the other hand does become a little repetitive. The real trouble with this CD is, just how much blues can a nineteen-year-old from the Derbyshire delta really sing? I think I can guess the answer and I assume so can you. The feeling that this is all a little overly earnest isn't helped when he seems to consciously ape the vocal stylings of one Kurt Cobain.

Ezra Pound once said that you should never publish anything before you are thirty, lest the follies of your youth should come back to haunt you. Which is fairly sound advice I think, for most. This is not to say that this is sheer folly, but rather that it will be interesting to hear what Mister Jones has to offer in the future should he choose to continue on the long and winding road that is a career in the arts today. It's not an easy choice to make to be sure, and he should be congratulated on making the effort.

AARON ROBERTSON
55 Audens Way, Midway, Swadlincote, Derbyshire, DE11 0HH, UK
lonesomejonesome@aol.com
www.lonesomejonesome.co.uk

cja

Ironclad
USA DIGITALIS DIGI013 / LAST VISIBLE DOG LVD076 CD (2004)

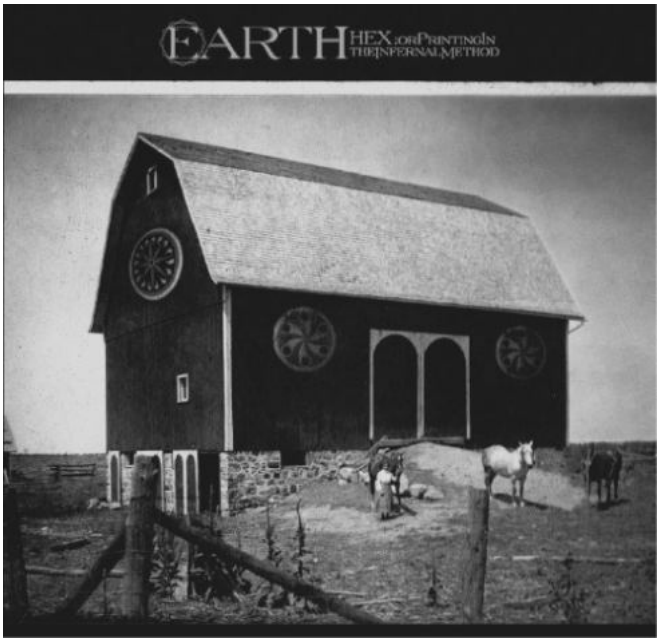
Cja, a.k.a Clayton Noone, hails from the bottom of the South Island of New Zealand, one of the most southern of civilised areas on the planet and a remote a place as any from which to launch a career in new music. I rather shamefully have to admit being unfamiliar with his oeuvre, despite hailing from the same fair shores as he, but judging from this CD it seems to be quite extensive. He also has been known to record a variety of noise under the magnificent nom de plume Armpit, and is a member of a sinister sounding outfit called The Futurians.

By his own standards this is apparently a very sedate affair. Maybe for this reason it is touted as the ideal introduction to his work, which can by all accounts verge on the manic. The album consists mainly of our boy Clayton on guitar beating out a variety of quite minimal pieces, all perhaps appropriately identified solely by their running length. This is not your ordinary clean-cut sort of minimalism however, but a dirty, messy second cousin of the genre that is perfectly at ease with tape hiss and accidental sounds. As Campbell Kneale of the mighty Birchville Cat Motel puts it, 'this is real…in all its mundane, apoplectic divinity.'

Continuously understated and with the melancholy air that seems particular to the part of the world that it emanates from, it makes pleasant enough listening. The album doesn't scale any particularly great heights, or depths for that matter, but is content to drift along on its very own sea of fuzz. All in all it seems like the perfect soundtrack to a wet Sunday afternoon, and the pieces are quite short so there is no danger of being sucked into some dreadful ennui whilst waiting for the start of another working week. This is cja's first outing on an American label, and then not one but two in fact, being a split release on Digitalis and Last Visible Dog.

AARON ROBERTSON
Digitalis: POB 700695, Tulsa, OK 74170, USA
brad@digitalisindustries.com
www.digitalisindustries.com
Last Visible Dog: POB 2631, Providence, RI 02906, USA
lastvisibledog@gmail.com
www.lastvisibledog.com

MALADROIT RHYTHMS of ROCK



Earth

Hex; or Printing in the Infernal Method

USA SOUTHERN LORD CD SUNN48 (2005)

A commendable effort in bringing together ambient soundtrack music and doom metal elements to convey the loneliness and grimness of life for many rural people in the United States in the 19th century, this album is sure to bring wider attention outside doom metal and stoner rock for this US group which began about 1990 as one of many thousands of Sabbath wannabees. I found this CD highly expressive and emotional after my initial impression that parts of it resembled albums made by Pink Floyd and Led Zeppelin in the early to mid-1970s faded away and that Dylan Carlson and current sidekick Adrienne Davies were not really out to emulate Ennio Morricone; in its clear, almost pained tones, the monotony of the tunes and riffs and the wide spaces within, and the plain production, the music calls forth the huge flat horizons of the prairies, deserts and badlands, and the implacable conditions that faced the people living there. Ambient effects and field recordings are unnecessary and indeed would have detracted from the overall ethos of the recording; only 'Raiford (The Felon Wind)' might be considered to be referential with a neo-primitve rhythm that acknowledges the mystical, shamanistic Native American presence in the landscapes evoked.

No lyrics are needed: all you need to know about this particular world and the hard and tough people and culture it bred is encapsulated in pithy titles like 'The Dire and Ever Circling Wolves', 'An Inquest Concerning Teeth' and 'The Dry Lake'. The last track 'Tethered to the Polestar' suggests a continuing journey towards hope and a Promised Land of Milk and Honey (and presumably a Hollywood that remakes American history without the blood, the sweat and the tears), and indeed the guitar tone is lighter and the pace slightly faster, but the very shortness of the piece might suggest that the goal at the end of the journey may not be without its disappointments.

The monotonous and repetitive nature of doom metal is turned to advantage to suggest an isolated, forgotten world where vast, flat and empty spaces can seem hugely oppressive and where the memory of a once-proud and independent people destroyed by genocide fades into insignificance. The people who replace the original inhabitants themselves toil under the burden of Western cultural expectations and values ('the American Dream'), the vagaries of the physical environment and the eventual industrialisation and urbanisation of the land. The music is complemented by a selection of black and white photographs of people and scenes from the period in question, all of which seem rather posed and distant (even the cowboy preparing to rope an animal looks statue-like) and give the impression of a people and culture far removed and very different from ours: a people more resigned to their fate and accepting of the stringencies imposed by their environment. But on second thoughts, perhaps this world is not very far removed from ours: when Peak Oil occurs and petrol (gasoline) becomes too expensive and other energy technologies are not yet ready for public use, people in the very areas of the American Midwest and the Rockies may find themselves cut off from everybody else and forced to fend for themselves in an environment stripped of its resources over the years.

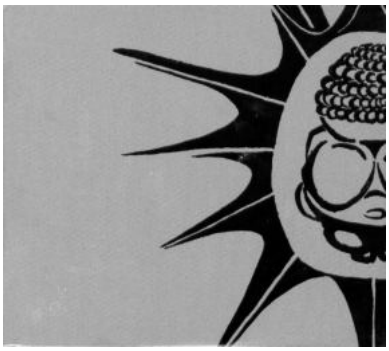
JENNIFER HOR 12/10/2005
www.southernlord.com
www.thronesanddominions.com

Årabrot

Making a Pact with Jesus

NORWAY RAT RECORDS RAT 7 CD (2005)

A short slab of obnoxious and noisy Norwegian 'art' metal here; they're dropping some hints that suggest they want to be included in the Black Metal fold, but even I can detect that they aren't really committed to it and would never sign away their soul to old 'Mr Pitchfork'. They're too arty, too self-consciously experimental; even the band name, rather than something found in an old book of satanic lore, comes from a city on the Norwegian coast! That said, they can bring home the bacon and deliver your daily diet of harsh, trebly electric guitars, frenetic drumming and throat-shredding vocals. Splotchy music, fiercely energised gobbets of ugh-rock...K Nemes wrote all the songs, and his band comprise NN, Marakel, and Deadly Nightshade. They're convincing, even if they do fall short of standards set by our American heavy metal cousins (eg Converge). American-ness may be an aspiration: their producer, Billy Anderson, has worked with Melvins, Neurosis and Fantomas; and many of the lyrics (sing in English) strive to include as much American slang as possible, and on this account they lapse into banality pretty quickly. Another problem is that every song is taken at the same fast tilt – maybe they should try slowing down and doing the 'doom' thing, although it sounds as though the bass player



couldn't quite deliver the necessary support for that. 'Liaison Summer' has too many proper musical dynamics to pass for real heavy metal, and sounds almost like No Wave; but 'Scag Cat' is a good one, achieving the required relentlessness. Oddly enough, their best shot is the seventh track, titled only by a jagged line, and it's almost a studio experiment; the guitar riff is looped, layers of noise are added, the ferocity is increased until it turns into a pounding massacre. An avant-metal statement of sorts. Other song titles include 'Rollocaust', 'Maladies', 'Worms' and 'Totschlager'. Front cover art depicts an exploding head in red and silver; music doesn't quite deliver same effect to your head, but it does try hard. Back cover is a detail from a Bosch painting; this, and title, shows their attempted dalliance with 'the man downstairs', but as indicated I think this is really more of an experimental record to join the Black Metal ranks. And you should never trust a band who say they're 'uncompromising'.

ED PINSENT 30/07/2005
www.arabrot.com
www.norwayratrecords.com

Charalambides

Our Bed is Green

USA KRANKY KRANK080 2 X CD (2005)

The 1992 debut album by lo-fi favourites Charalambides, which originally spanned the entirety of a 90-minute cassette, now receives a double CD reissue from Kranky. The album has quite a history of being reissued it would appear, first and foremost by the band themselves on CDR, in 1995, and more recently on vinyl from Time Lag just last year. What need for another, you may ask? Well, this double CD probably makes for the most commercially minded example so far, coming as it does from the label that is home to acts such as Pan-American and Low, and may lead no doubt to a re-evaluation of the groups continuing influence.

It's an intriguing mix of a sort of folky blues, guitar pyschedelia and improvisational otherness, which on the first listening slips past quite unremarkably, but grows in stature with each playing, to become in time something akin to a monolithic testament to the DIY musical ethic. What it doesn't sound like is something that was recorded the better part of fourteen years ago, remaining remarkably fresh after all these years, even under the layer of oxidised tape particles that must have seeped into the very construction of the songs contained here; a lesson perhaps to those with more of a budget and less ideas.

Born of the holy union of Tom Carter and Christina Madonia, this is understated yet quietly haunting music that has obviously lasted longer than their marriage did. In fact they seem to have gone to great lengths to put some distance between themselves, now apparently choosing to reside on opposite coasts of the United States. What colour their respective beds now are I have no idea. The main thing is that it seems as if they do continue to make music together, though under possibly less than ideal circumstances. For this we should all be thankful.

AARON ROBERTSON
P.O. Box 259319, Chicago, IL 60625-9319, U.S.A
krankypromo@sbcglobal.net
www.kranky.net

Sun Plexus

Or Ou Feraille? A Quelle Profondeur?

FRANCE RONDA RND 04 CD (2004)

After initial promise of insanity and weirdness in early tracks, this CD of art-rock quickly gets pretty dull, if not downright silly. It does start with a fine bit of perplexing noise; there's a solemn percussive opening, after which 'Kit Pollini' delivers some utterly disjointed guitar rock, assisted by Drumbo-sytled drumming, horrible percussion effects, and additional horrible vocal groans – all of which instils a good degree of bewilderment. Pretty good arty grunge...and there's a sense of gloom and dread in its mad urgency, which you can use as a soundtrack for the pictures on the covers. Front cover shows three sun-worshippers in pagan stance, silhouetted against that golden orb that is a totemic object for them. Back cover depicts three naked women running headlong into the sea; as you play this opening track, you might imagine these bathers scuttling off to flee some nuclear-powered doom, or be eaten alive by sea monsters. 'Gnocchi' likewise is another case of frying pan or fire; it offers little relief from implied terror and violence, with its world-weary voice resignedly barking its gibberish into a distorted mic, against a PiL-styled rhythm backing.

Sun Plexus come from Romania. I think, musically speaking, they might be no more than a gang of thuggish lunkheads. They have quite a few clunkers in their past career which should lead you to suspect something's up. They've been at it for over ten years, and reading the press indicates quite a bit about their restless nature, indeed their very dogged persistence in trying every avenue they can to aggressively inflict their music on this innocent world, most of which wants no part of it. Sun Plexus would like to think they're 'provocative', which is always a bad sign. They once released a record with the infelicitous (ie utter crap) title *Where are all these Chinese coming from*. They had a release on the awful French label Non Mi Piace Disques. And *Melody Maker*, the naffest of all the music papers, apparently awarded them some form of approbation in 1995. If I also tell you they favour using scrap metal as a musical instrument, and their other grisly track titles include 'Coup de hache', 'Blessures Secretes' and 'Amityville', I think you'll agree this has gone quite far enough.

ED PINSENT 25/07/2005
www.ronda-label.com

Reptiljan

The Hellbender Suite

FINLAND SOME PLACE ELSE SPECD05033 CD (2005)

Don't know what to make of Mr Niko Skorpio Sirklä, an 'arty' heavy metal guy from Finland who also claims to be 'into' wild and dark electro-noise...he's certainly good at providing puffed-up press releases about himself and his achievements. He seems to be more about the 'pose' than delivering the goods in his music. This *Hellbender* suite of his speaks of 'blast-beats of grindcore' and 'the broken rhythms of drill'n'bass', and promises much in the way of dark, gory delights; but it turns out to be pretty ordinary speeded-up Techno music, with the drum machines and sequencers set at insane speeds, while the surface is a sick-sounding mess created with dull, fuzzed-up blorp from synths, bass guitars and effects pedals. His excessively long titles may create the illusion that his music carries lots of 'ideas', but they are probably little more than in-jokes and insider references to other people, friends, local scenes, silly things he's interested in, and nonsense of that sort. 'Outauguration of the Chimp Zombie', indeed. Why, this record is quite preposterous.

ED PINSENT 31/07/2005
www.someplaceelse.net

THE DRONING ONES

Tom Carter and Vanessa Arn / The Moglass

Snake-Tongued Swallow-Tailed

UKRAINE NEXSOUND NS28 CD [2004]

A great split CD on this fine Ukrainian label. First we have two tracks by Tom Carter and Vanessa Arn. Their 'Mojave' is a melancholy exploration of this desert landscape using very restrained electronics, a stringed instrument, a slide guitar...everything is played in a reduced way, the stringed instruments brushed with miniaturist Kyoto-like gestures. Filled with atmosphere, it immediately evokes the strange, alien and sometimes hostile characteristics of nature. We are not at home on our own Mother Planet, this music is telling us...we are failing as the custodians of its many life forms. A tragic-filled dirge, a whimpering and droning 'classic' if ever there was. 'Atmananda' likewise drones its way into your life with added guitar scrapes, again an unobtrusive but atmospheric piece, but a shade more menacing than predecessor. Still surveying the planet's surface with alien eyes, Carter and Arn work that guitar sound obsessively, mining it for possibilities. Maintaining its languid, drifting pace, this work never becomes twee or tasteful. Quite long (22 mins) workout of eerie shimmering beauty; think of My Cat Is An Alien without any of the rocky Sonic-Youth baggage.

Both these Carter/Arn cuts seem to be drenched in sunlight; theirs is the daylight half of the disc, while the night belongs to The Moglass. Three nocturnal and darkly brooding episodes these pieces do be...'Tawny Owl' is a grim, almost urban piece of desolate electronic darkness, far from the sunlit beauties of nature proposed by Carter and Arn. There's the noise of clattered and echoed percussion, groans and squeals, madmen in wheelchairs spinning crazily down strange corridors of sound. Very eerie. Unlike the owl of Chuck Bettis (see *Sonic Sigils*, elsewhere this ish), their owl is a gigantic and static war-mongering creature, staring at us balefully.

'The Map (Webfootprinted)' may, as a title at least, refer us back to the Nexsound label's Psychogeography compilation. However, this track is very disorientating for a map! A queasy mix of alien sounds, odd melodies which don't quite fit together pasted into a gluey mix, with snatches of sampled song...almost a nightmare. What an ingenious construct! Follow this map to the inner recesses of memory, to discover pockets of lost time, metaphysical realms...the music is underpinned by a digital thobbing pulse and a very distorted guitar, which just about manages to work out a wobbly melody of sorts. 13 minutes of oddness.

The last track has a silly title which I couldn't be bothered copying out. It's another example of layering and constructing, it has some sampled voices which are mostly drowned out and swept away by a heavy echoed drone sound, some uncertain guitar phrases. Again the form of it is dreamlike, connections arrived at through free associating, and a wilful pressing onwards into unknown zones of the brain. The sleeve for this release is a fold-out card affair, itself not unlike a map, with images of frog, bird and lizard, hinting at a vision of nature as something that's probably beyond our comprehension. As said, the daytime/nocturne ambience does give this record a nice yin-yang structure that elevates it above the hordes of other droney records. See the world anew.

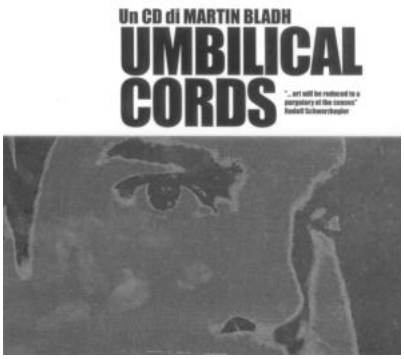
EED PINSENT 31/07/2005
www.nexsound.org
www.wholly-other.com
www.moglass.com

Martin Bladh

Umbilical Cords

SWEDEN SEGERHUVA SEGER 10 CD (2005)

An interesting oddity from this Swedish label, which is home to many a death-dealing,



retrograde style of nasty-blasty-noise. Bladh thankfully comes from somewhere more subtle than that, and over the stretch of four 'Cords' and one 'Appendix', he unburdens his soul via these strange, unsettling droning episodes. His sound-world is filled with strings tensed to breaking point, creaking and groaning cellos moaning for mercy as they're relentlessly sawed by manic psychopaths, plus clouds of cymbal-based percussion – all cleverly layered into dense, wholesome chunks of agonising, troubling noise.

Bladh is also in IRM and Skin Area, both of whom have records on Segerhuva. Through his sound and other meagre clues plastered on CD sleeve, it seems Bladh is concerned with conveying an unearthly, metaphysical dread. He brings in a close-up of (his own?) angst-ridden eyes for the cover image, agape in horror at unspeakable terrors unknown to man. He pulls in erudite quotes from Antonin Artaud and Rudolf Schwarzkogler, which speak in resigned tones of death, terror and purgatory. The use of the word 'Umbilical' also suggests that some sort of primal birth-trauma may also be a subtext. Very deep!

This record certainly brings home the bacon if you feel the need to cloak your mortal soul in a cloud of nameless fears and angsts. The acoustical instruments are mainly to the fore, and his strings have plenty of bite; you may want to skip to the third 'Cord' which has slightly softer, electronic elements which leaven the otherwise severe mix. Bladh's work has a strange, surreal beauty; very single-minded and intensive long-form trancey workouts, invoking sinister forces. Very good.

ED PINSENT 09/07/2005
www.segerhuva.se

Andy Hayleck
The Disappearing Floor
USA RECORDED 013 CD (ND)

Described by composer/creator Hayleck (Baltimore, USA) as a set of 'bowed metal and field recordings', and this is exactly what we hear. His tools for the 'bowing' side of things include the guitar, feedbacks, cymbals, and filters; plus, on tracks 6, 7 and 10, the famous Harry Bertoia sound sculptures, which have charmed and fascinated so many acolytes. The field recordings come from earlier visits he made to Hungary. The finished results are pleasant enough; his approach works quite well when he layers the two basic modes together, putting bowed metal with field recordings in a sympathetic combination and providing a more diverse listening experience. Even so, it's not quite as radical as one would hope; this may be because his droning method is, well, rather ordinary – he's strong on the monotony, but not so hot on the intensity. He rarely seems to explore the inner core of a drone, so much as explore around the outside of it rather timidly.

As to his field recordings, I wouldn't have known about the Hungary connection if sleeve notes hadn't told me; Hayleck has no interest whatsoever in the places he visits and documents, and indeed his declared mission is to 'deliberately obscure the original sound source'. With all the fervour of the true Puritan, he wants 'sounds to exist for their own sake' and to be 'perceived on their own terms'. This would be fine, if only he

generated more material that was worth listening to in the first place. Oh, this music isn't bad by any means, but it isn't very moving or engaging, and where many droning sounds suggest to me limitless vistas or infinite space, Hayleck's drones seems to have rather limited horizons, and are lacking in depth. Comes with insert of nature photographs; this could almost have been an Anomalous Records release. It may also be of interest in certain circles because of the Bertoia connection; I think Steve Roden has also recorded himself playing a Bertoia chair.

ED PINSENT 17/07/2005
www.recorded.com

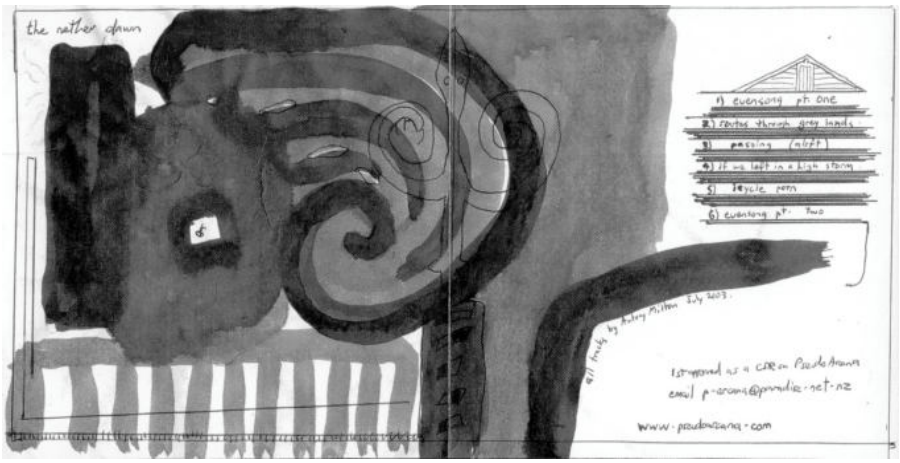
The Nether Dawn
Whiskey Mute-Down
USA LAST VISIBLE DOG LVD 060 CD (2005)

Antony Milton who also records as AM gives us six cuts of wispy shifty-drifty NZ-styled droning, as if there wasn't enough of it in the world already! Actually he's quite different to Lovely Midget which I played earlier today. Milton is slightly more grungy with a scuzzy vibe to his outpourings, and yet (like Lovely Midget) this record contains some weather / landscape / time of day references too – admittedly very ambiguous ones. Obviously there's nothing else to do in New Zealand except look at the sky. On the opener 'Evensong part one' you get the feeling he's pulling off an Ashtray Navigations impersonation in places, the same degraded 4-track recorder feel, and vaguely cosmic guitar workouts – with a good layering of sound, Milton's music gently pulls you into its magnetic field. 'Routes through grey lands' makes use of cassette loops, while Milton's accompanying playing is very slow and muted, muffled and languid. Why does it always sound like he was working on a very hot day? What's generated is not so much a solid drone as an insubstantial quagmire of unidentified masses, piled up like soggy spadeloads of peat. Sleepy sounds for the Nether Dawn. However, 'If we left in a high storm' is more uptempo, wherein a bass and a ghostly voice are joined by a slightly urgent guitar buzz. 'Icycle Porn' is a more conventional droner, almost checking into a room at the Birchville Cat Motel. All good music, plus some of AM's delightful paintings and watercolours to decorate the sleeve; recorded in 2003, originally issued on his own PseudoArcana label as a CDR.

ED PINSENT 24/07/2005
www.lastvisibledog.com

Jason Kahn / Jason Lescalleet
Red Room
USA CHLOË RECORDINGS CHLOË006 CD (2004)

Almost an archetypal 'droning' record, this CD gives you a roomful of quiet droning sounds which gather in intensity as disc is unspun. The US players Jason Kahn and Jason Lescalleet recorded these four cuts live at a venue called The Red Room in Baltimore, in 2003. Mike Bullock is proud of this release, and speaks in the liner notes of an audience being swallowed and enveloped in the density of the sonic mass. Hard to deny truth of this



utterance. Realised with analogue synths, tapes, Casio keyboards and percussion; the performers turn in an accomplished set of slow and deliberate actions, ably controlling the release and flow of the atmospheric gases. Naturally, as happens with most slow music, your bodily system responds and slows down in sympathy, until you begin to float around the room as is suspended in a pool of amniotic fluid. Of the four titles – as if they were really needed – the best one is 'dronevil3', a tribute to Sunn O))) if ever there was, although clearly these two guys are far too 'nice' to dabble in the forbidden dark drone-metal zones. Nonetheless, this is a long and absorbing and quite wonderful set.

ED PINSENT 12/07/2005
www.chloechloe.cc

Mattin / Dion Workman

Via Vespucci
GREECE ANTIFROST afro2025 CD (2005)

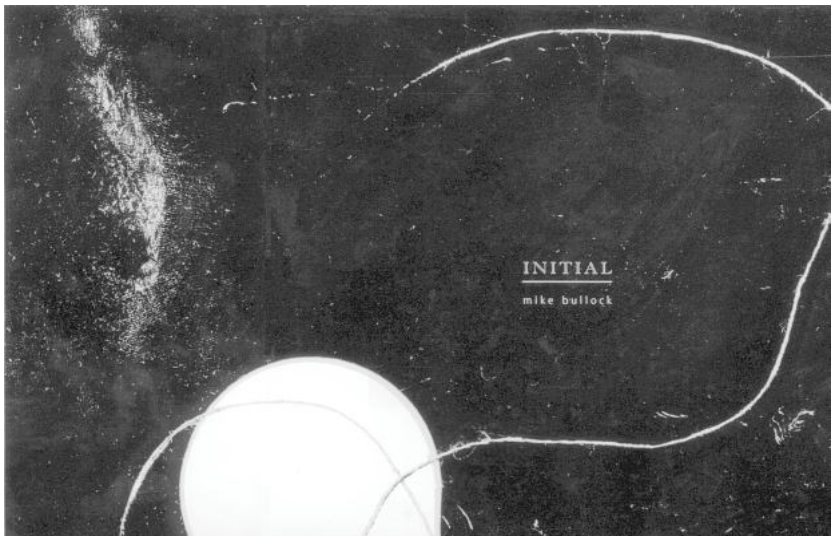
A low, attenuated whine exudes near-silent menace, over 19 minutes of tension and hate! Gradually, this hateful noise turns into a low, burring growl, like that of a robotic panther programmed to psyche you out by staring at you for long moments, before it pounces on you and rips out your throat. Talk about your antisocial tendencies! No wonder Mattin rarely collaborates with anyone! Pound for pound, this record is even more 'minimal' than a lot of the current Erstwhile stuff doing the rounds, but Mattin would be far too fierce to fit in with that friendly co-operative bunch. Alienated from the world, he works up a bitter, electronic sulk and sits there frowning like a stone mullet. Eventually the sound of his constrained emotion turns into a jet-engine roar, still laced with slow-burning anger. A real friendship killer, this one...great stuff!

ED PINSENT 25/07/2005
www.antifrost.gr

Mike Bullock

Initial
USA CHLOË RECORDINGS CHLOË001 CD (ND)

Quite good – two contrabass solos played by Bullock and recorded live in December 2000 in Quebec and Baltimore. The first one is preferable, almost amounting to a minimalist statement for the bass, being extremely simple and pushing heavily on the volume,



feedback and drone elements, thus keeping listener happy and well-fed with a continuous feed of solid amplified blackness. The audience ambience is there too, their chattering fading away as the work fades in and grows in confidence, grows in stature, silencing their blather. The second performance involves more conventional 'sawing' action and is a bit boring in comparison. Bhob Rainey mastering job on this one; very arty insert of photographs, semi-poetic titles and tracing paper, all adding a vague aura of mysteriousness which isn't really present in the work.

ED PINSENT 10/07/2005
www.chloechloe.cc

Black Boned Angel

Supereclipse
USA 20 BUCK SPIN SPIN:001 CD (2005?)

He got off to a bit of a shaky start in these pages and his Birchville Cat Motel project seems to have undergone a fair few mutations so it's good that Campbell Kneale is still forging ahead, this time with more confidence and consistency, and now enters the arena of drone doom metal with this new project named after a song by UK industrial/heavy metal band Godflesh. The velvet gloves of BCM are off right away in the first track: deep lithospheric rumbles and shudders, courtesy of a deep bassy guitar with strings hanging onto the ground, dominate much of the piece while a high-pitched chainsaw whines overhead and a stoned monk mutters secret rites in the background. (Haven't we heard that one before?) In the manner of a huge Jagannath idol, the music trundles at a pace most glacial, all very monotonous and repetitive, the emphasis being, I think, on the sheer concrete heaviness of the sound, its texture and the sinister mood generated. Towards the end of the track, Kneale adds echo and a reverb effect to the guitars and the ground begins to boil ominously.

The second part of the CD brings back the chainsaw guitar and introduces a siren: again a slow and monotonous piece, and quite spacious despite the continuous drone. The third and final part of the recording brings in a skull-crushing pile-driver riff that will punch vast spaces in your head. You'll end up wandering around the neighbourhood looking like Swiss cheese; small children and pet dogs will flee in terror on seeing you. Play this track often enough and the ground will shake so much that one day you'll look out the window and instead of seeing dreary apartment blocks you'll gaze upon an entire new mountain range with pristine vegetation and waterfalls.

The major gripe I have with *Supereclipse* is that Kneale is wearing his influences a little too obviously on his sleeve to the point where they almost dictate what he's doing on this CD; the riffs on the last track in particular could have come straight off one of Godflesh's early albums: they seem to have that same desolate, almost quasi-religious air about them. All three tracks are basically rather repetitive and monotonous rhythm pieces in the style of early 1980s Swans which I suppose is what Kneale is after but this means that the record as a whole can be a bit unsatisfying and may not sound quite complete to those people who want some topping on their rhythm pieces. (Unless there's going to be a *Supereclipse2* in the manner of those SunnO))) albums *white1* and *white2*, to say nothing of that group's *black1* album which was being recorded at this time of writing.) At this point in time, we're probably going to need more than maximum volume to achieve transcendence the BBA way.

JENNIFER HOR 14/06/2005
www.20buckspin.com

★The *Crackling* Esther

BOLTS OF SHAKY LIGHTNING JUICE RATTLING THE IMPOSSIBLE ASPIRIN BOTTLE!

Philip Sanderson
Seal Pool Sounds
UK SEAL POOL spool 02
CD (2005)

Great record by Sanderson, themed around a concept of marine life found at the zoo. Might be worth comparing this with Merzbow's *24 Hours: A Day Of Seals* box set, although Merzbow's take on similar subject is much wilder and untamed, suggesting the sheer terror of extreme nature in the raw. Sanderson locates his work in a more domesticated setting, as suggested by the photographs taken from a seal pool in Osaka, and his record has an overall 'friendlier' sound. Think of The digital-era Residents, or those fine Moebius/Plank LPs on the Sky label from 1981-1982.

Seal Pool Sounds is a brilliant collection of assured, skewed and sometimes rather queasy electronic abstract paintings. The opening track 'Oil on Troubled Daughters' is closest to being a portrait of the seals themselves; certainly it's very suggestive of those agile, slipppery black bodies turning about under the surface of the water. Lovers of pop melody are advised to click on to 'Feeding Time', a slice of jaunty analogue synth melody that owes much to Delia Derbyshire and The Residents, and its jollity will have you clapping your flippers in appreciation. 'Big Glass' features a midi piano, while 'Umwell' contains sound effects, distorted voices and backwards tapes. Although some of the later tracks are a bit silly – eg 'Nude Nights' and the dribbly nonsense of 'Radium Lab', overall this is very creditable. It could almost be used as a TV soundtrack record, if anyone working in television these days had any imagination left...

Philip Sanderson has collaborated with Organum and is best known for his work in Storm Bugs, a 1980s cassette band whose work is sporadically being retrieved in assorted reissue programmes; you all recall the *Reprint* CD issued by Anomalous Records. His music is perhaps no longer as edgy as that early work, but he's still full of ideas, and for this record at least he wishes to evince an interest in Raymond Scott, Marcel Duchamp and French New Wave film music. Try a dip...it's cool in the pool.

ED PINSENT 23/07/2005
http://home.att.ne.jp/wood/grot/sealpool.html

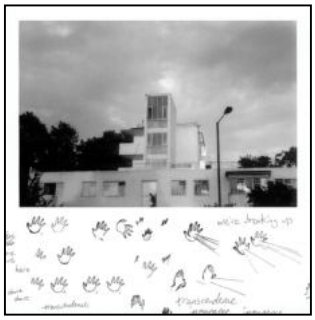
Tim Hecker
Mirages
CANADA ALIEN8 RECORDINGS ALIENCD47
CD (2004)

Now this is quite an agreeable if not very satisfying album of Fennesz-style electronica: even that initially abrasive intro 'acephale' with those sonic sandpaper textures falls well into the range of Fennesz's currently moody guitar-electronics. Indeed there's not a great deal on this recording that Herr Christian couldn't do himself and moreover he'd have done it with a sharper edge (at least when he was on top of his game around 1997 - 1999) and a fuller, more shapely sound; still if you like fuzzy mellow soundscapes with sprinklings of fine-grained noise that tip the music into the not-quite-but-almost-there edgy territory, then Tim Hecker is your man.

Apart from 'acephale' there is no one track that really stands out; often the music segues from the obvious change in ambience, pace of style. 'the truth of accountants' is a very relaxing and shimmery piece which should, ah, please my work colleagues, some of whom are accountants. 'balkanize-you' is another very enjoyable track in an airy buzzy-throbbing kind of way: as the music progresses, it goes a bit jerky, the underlying static counterpoint comes to the fore and the mood darkens as though a storm is brewing on the horizon. You can almost feel the wind freshen up. Later there is a steely guitar rumble 'neath some plaintive celeste tones but it all seems to end rather inconclusively. 'incurably optimistic!' is rather bland and too serene for my liking and the guitarist David Bryant seems lost in there but that's likely because his playing has been heavily processed. Other special guests include Le Fly Pan Am and Christof Mignone on track 3 and, at the risk of embarrassing someone, should I mention that Oren Ambarchi plays guitar on track 9 on this album?

In all, not a really very challenging work and in places perilously close to New Age muzak: I think the pace of the music needs to vary more and the sounds and textures offer possibilities which Hecker seems to have ignored. The special guests don't appear to add anything special that Hecker himself couldn't have provided.

JENNIFER HOR 31/03/2005
www.alien8recordings.com



We're Breaking Up
Here and Above
UK TWOTHOUSANDAND 2++9 CD (2004)

This is the alias of solo guy Michael Rodgers, and here's his second full-length release for this label. His debut was a diverting and faintly elegiac set of electronic experiments, themed around ideas of loneliness and separation. I've always associated him with mobile phones, as his nom de plume is a phrase that's commonly found in the mouths of those multitudes who can't face life without their little 'moby' cradled in their mitt and lots of comforting buttons for their fingers to press, as they await the reassuring purr of an incoming call or text message. From this activity, they seem to derive much comfort. It's not too outlandish to suggest that now, Rodgers has practically become his own mobile phone; a sensitive transmitter / receiver that relays messages about the condition of modern life.

Indeed this CD (like many on this label) works had to engage with the travails of urban life. When trying to mix this record in his basement, he had to wear headphones most of the time just to shut out the sound of traffic, neighbours and other urban detritus. This led him to notice that it's virtually impossible nowadays to find anywhere in the city that's silent – there's noise pollution everywhere. Not a particularly original insight, but as a fellow sufferer it's a view that gets my endorsement. WBU began to philosophise; realising that there's no escape, he wanted to find ways to merge with the elements in the urban surroundings. 'Observe buildings gazing into the horizon,' is his advice. 'Feel streetlamps pouring light on you at night. Imagine that in breathing you exchange part of yourself with your surroundings.'

Of the two long tracks, the first one is simply monolithic – it starts out with a huge grinding set of abstracted, throbbing tones, and initially strikes you as about as pointless as watching a steam roller laying down a roadful of tarmac, 50 miles long. Just as you're about to give up, however, distorted voices and party sounds start to leak in, thus alleviating the tedium of this extremely low-key minimalism, and it all grows from here. The second cut is further distorted and distressed monolith-styled humming, buzzing and droning, as if the performer is moving too near or to far away from his radio mast. WBU may be part of the generation that believes that everything important can be contained within a mobile phone, but he's transcending that. He's also transcending technology. His doodled artwork shows open, outstretched hands, either receiving or transmitting beams of power via the palms. This is juxtaposed with a very ordinary snapshot of a very ordinary building, a list of random words (track titles?) referring to windows, the sky, buildings, parts of the street, looking and listening. Even if there is no escape, this recording somehow seeks a way out; searches for a way to see and hear new things in amongst all the chaos, perhaps by

arriving at a state of intense concentration aided by these purposeful drones.

ED PINSENT 17/07/2005
www.twothousandand.com

For another take on the ongoing mobile phone debate, see Martin Archer's *Heritage and Ringtones*, this ish.

C-Schulz
5.Flicker Tunes
GERMANY SONIG 42CD
CD (2004)

A splendid set of gently hypnotic music, mostly electronic but not exclusively – C-Schulz also uses instruments like organ, oboes, accordion, and percussion, and he's joined by a guitarist, a horn player, a violinist and saxophonist, plus two members of Mouse On Mars guesting on one track. This is all extremely pleasant music and sometimes achieves a somewhat 'pastoral' feel – the sonic equivalent of healthy countryside rambles, lots of fresh air and sunshine and leafy green environs. For each episode, he's concerned with extremely simple explorations of one basic musical approach, insistently working away at it and milking it dry (or grinding it down, if you prefer). Early Kraftwerk, before they brought in all those four-square rhythms and percussion pads, seemed to be a lot more open to the potential of exploring musical landscapes in that way; C-Schulz exhibits the same open-endedness here.

Which isn't to say this is just another 'meandering' collection of formless music. The pieces drift and float in a charming manner, with no rhythmical core. Mesmerising and shimmering instrumentals, with nice harmonic patterns, pleasing chord combinations and fascinating textures. Instruments (and there are several of them) all merge together in a pool of sound; the dynamic development of each piece may be subtle, but even if things start out a bit murky they will become crystal-clear as a mountain stream as the piece progresses. 'Flicker' is particularly strong. Two slightly out-of-phase accordion tracks create a shimmering effect, with light percussion work and other sonic effects added as tonal washes.

8 tracks in all plus a QuickTime video called 'Swelan'. *The Sound Projector* does not review videos, regardless of their quality. This nice CD won't satisfy you if you require harsh and aggressive noise in your diet, but it will reward you pleasantly if you want to locate a still centre of calmness and peace.

ED PINSENT 16/07/2005
www.sonig.com

Reuber
Kintopp
GERMANY STAUBGOLD
48 CD/LP (2005)

Third full-length release by Tim Reuber from Cologne. The utterly silly cover photograph put me off at first, but the music herein is good. A fine example of lively Euro-instrumental studio craft, bright, melodic and entertaining. No surprise to find Joseph Suchy has assisted with it, that ace guitarist and multi-instrumentalist overdub freak; Matthas Gulicher is also credited. 13 cuts, LP length; the word 'Kintopp' is German slang for the cinema, and they call this music that 'narrates a movie...creates images in the mind of the listener', Well, that's a far from original sentiment, but their studio compositions certainly do much to engage the intelligent audience. Which is more than I can say for the presence of Volker Wurth on the front cover, dressed like a prize buffoon – cowboy hat, boots, leather jacket, striped pants, shades...apparently having shot a stuffed toy animal with a crossbow.

This is cleverly composed and integrated, almost a 'mini-symphony' in modern electronic pop. There's even a nice reflective passage in the middle, after the bouncy opening cuts, where you can watch the trees going by outside the car window. We have heard some solo Suchy discs which are much wilder and dynamic and noisier than this one, but if only more modern pop records were executed with such flair and skill. Layers of crisp sound, strong performances and interplay, dynamics and subtlety...all tracks segue neatly to provide a continuous entertainment, so crack open a soft drink, relax and enjoy this snappy musical snack. Reuber is something of a connoisseur in the field of 'psychedelic' electronic music, witness his work as Klangwart with Markus Detmer.

ED PINSENT 23/08/2005
www.staubgold.com

Keith Fullerton Whitman / Greg Davis
Yearlong
USA CARPARK RECORDS
CRPK029 CD (2005)

Laptop duo music from two Americans. Some of this is pretty good, especially the strong and chaotic opening tracks. Keith Fullerton Whitman and Greg Davis played lots of live shows during 2001-2002, mostly in charming USA venues where there was lots of tasty food, but also a few in cold and hostile European concert halls with nothing to eat on offer. This record is a compressed aural tour diary of their odyssey, which the world will never forget, edited down from 18 hours of recordings into 45 minutes. The better to represent their own confusion that resulted from this whirlwind journey, the 13 tracks are not laid out in chronological order, and they may have been edited or post-processed. The intention is to create a strong and distilled listening experience.

Whitman is a good player and not known to hide himself behind banks of expensive FX pedals; about his lifelong friend Davis, I know next to nothing, although he seems to be a young musical prodigy and runs a record label in Boston. *Yearlong* is rather a scrambled experience and initial listens make it hard to get a purchase; you may need time to digest some of the shards of sound that are being insinuated into your aural gullet. At least one of the early cuts – perhaps track 2 or 3 – shows the musicians getting really carried away, and it delivers surprise after surprise for the expectant listener, even if he's expecting to be surprised. The aural shocks keep piling on, like a wave of bombs from tiny toy bomber planes.

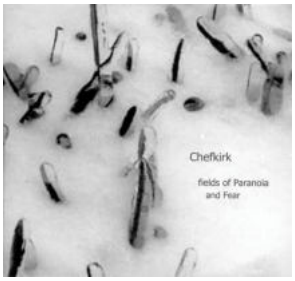
Unfortunately it goes off the boil pretty quickly, and about half of the disc contains some rather ordinary tinkly-plonky sequencer noodling. It starts to feel cold; you notice there's no sense of the music being performed live, even when the sleeve notes tell us it was; the presence of the audience has been carefully effaced from the finished product. Then you wonder how much interaction there was between the two players; looking for some, you find very little, and it starts to feel even colder. Still, there is a lot of humour and even a lot of love in evidence, very little aggression in their sounds (they're a couple of nice guys, for sure), and they (sometimes) display a commitment to off-the-wall sound manipulation that generates a little excitement.

ED PINSENT 12/07/2005
www.carparkrecords.com

Andreas Meland
Deaf Leoppard
NORWAY
ENLIGHTENMENT ENL003
3" CD (2005)

Despite fairly silly title, this is a fine mini CD by this Norwegian experimenter; five tracks of pleasant electronic droning with added wind chimes and other effects. Somehow, the five separate tracks cohere so as to amount to some form of fully realised statement. I think it's done perhaps by a free-associative approach to editing – see his Brakhage contribution, elsewhere. Just by the interlocking of a few simple sonic events, Meland achieves many pleasing effects which are just like real music. Although there are a few moments of familiar laptop effects – for example the 'stuck note' thing, the 'loop' thing, and the 'fizz' thing – in general he manages to stay on the right side of cliché.

ED PINSENT 25/07/2005
info@enlightenment.no



Chefkirk
Fields of Paranoia and Fear
DENMARK ORGANIC PIPELINE OP006 CDR (2005)

Chefkirk
Kik-kik-kikkik
GREECE 1000+1 TiLt CDR (2005)

Couple of new Chefkirk releases this season...*Fields of Paranoia and Fear* is a good nine-tracker, LP length CDR release, 50 copies only on the Organic Pipeline label out of Denmark. For anti-electronica fans, this could be just the ticket! On it, he deals in aggressive, full-on digital electronics for much of time, but never neglects form and dynamics, even when pulled into the uncontrolled maelstrom of noise. As title indicates, there be a dark edge to these nine twisted cuts, telling of anger, and negative energy. He uses beats in a mad way; very few clichéd or familiar sounds to be found; raw and primitive, and mastered for playback in the unacceptably loud zone. Oh, and some sampled but completely garbled TV and radio voices. Exciting, punchy, simple, direct. Chefkirk is Roger H Smith by name. He did 1 or 2 releases for Simple Logic Records in Poland and world has never been the same since. Watch out for long (18:11) final track – 'fear, suspicion, mistrust, terror' is its name, and its agenda – a shopping list from the Cold War – pretty much all the stops are pulled out. Devastating basic noise will grind away your resistance and leave you in paranoid, fearful condition.

Kik-Kik-Kikkik is a 29 minute EP. It's on a Greek label. Less frenetic than above. Still a compelling racket, all

his own music, his sonic fingerprints in evidence. Here he demonstrates how easy it is for him to put you into a trance, using his very basic repetitive phrases, then snap you out of it in seconds. Moulding materials in a most pro-active manner. He's shaping the sounds in his hands like so much plasticine, plasticine mixed with metal shards.

ED PINSENT 27/07/2005
www.organicpipeline.com
www.geocities.com/tiltrecordings
www.tibprod.com/chefkirk.htm

Also out by Chefkirk - *Western Grip*, NORWAY TIBPROD tibcd30 CDR (2004)

Nightshift
Nightshift
GREECE ANTIFROST
afro2032 CD (2005)

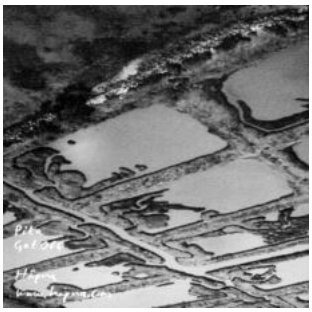
Pretty tedious...an hour-long set of minimal electronics by these two Greek urns, built in alternating layers with field recordings. The piece is structured so it develops, marching with some determination into the battle-zones of intensity, but it's such a harsh, processed, relentless sound that you can't be bothered hanging around for the ride on that particular war chariot. as11 did the field recordings and editing; Thodoris Zioutos did sound generation and live electronics. Together, it seems they want to 'canalize their frenetic hot pulses', but I can tell you there's no pulsebeat on this dying patient, and it's about as hot as a three-day old pitta bread. As for frenetic, I've seen furniture exhibitions more lively than this! Hoover sounds turn into jet-engine sounds, with loads of inept and pointless knob-twiddling on top. Dribble-dribble...blip-blip...drone-drone...yawn-yawn.

ED PINSENT 21/08/2005
www.antifrost.gr

Peter Rehberg
Fremdkoerper
AUSTRIA MOSZ 007 CD (2005)

One of Peter Rehberg's dance-related projects; another one was *Showroomdummies*, credited to DACM, and it's equally as unimpressive as that turkey. Chris Haring is the choreographer and

beneficiary of this commission; his dance work seems to comprise men in their pants rolling on their backs on the floor in a pool of light. I couldn't endure hearing the whole CD, which I found very ordinary – cold, clinical and boring. 'Mutilsil' will



send you to sleep with its dreary ambient murmurs; 'Scream' is slightly more agitated, but has a general aimlessness which it tries to redeem through pointless repetitions of an organ stab, and something coming dangerously close to generic Techno dance beats. '407' is simply monotonous, About this point I turned off. Perhaps the music worked in context of seeing the men in their pants, but played back on the hi-fi it lacks fibre, meaning, and bite. Where is the insane, driven and noisy delight of Rehberg's earlier MEGO releases? It ain't here, that's for sure.

ED PINSENT 17/07/2005
www.mosz.org

Pita
Get Off
SWEDEN HÄPNA H.19 CD (2005)

I was hoping for a return to form here, but Peter Rehberg has pretty much lost his charm for this listener with his recent releases, a series of very dreary efforts. This is another of them. It comprises edited highlights from materials recorded live over a two-year period. I'll say this much positive for the second track, which at least has a bit of volume and a pair of balls (not to mention a silly, vulgar title which I won't repeat), but not much energy to it. When he runs out of ideas for what to do with it, he simply switches it off. Indeed, in its droney 'celestial' qualities, it might be some kind of riposte to his former colleague Fennesz, and the latter's commercial success. May be far-fetched to think of these guys as the Lennon and McCartney of electronica, but perhaps there's some truth in it.

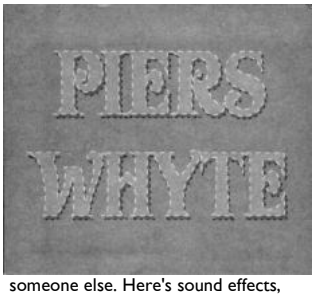
Remainder of disc is for most part a pile of half-baked electronic mush – mediocre, banal, heavy-handed, and filled with the sorts of sounds that, in this field, are stale clichés already. This last lapse is unforgivable on Pita's part; he used to be streets ahead of all the competition. Tracks 5 and 6 do get vaguely agitated and even obnoxious in a good way, but they are short and inconsequential. Track 8 has a nice sound, but it proves itself to be a pointless and irritating drone, going nowhere.

Pita has lost his artistic voice. This is bringing out the reactionary in me, but I still remember how he used to criticise and dismiss improvisers, because to him they were just 'making it up as they go along'. Well, Pita's lack of musical craft is sure starting to show up now! I'm not here to tell you it was all a flash in the pan, but let's hope the laptop music 'bubble' is finally beginning to burst, as this major hero of the genre is proving to have feet of clay.

ED PINSENT 24/08/2005
www.hapna.com

Piers Whyte
Piers Whyte
CANADA ACHE RECORDS
ACHE017 CD (2005)

Nine tracks of below-average electronica on this Canadian label. Piers Whyte (formally of Heavy Party) is probably working solo on this yawner. Not an unpleasant record, but extremely derivative; there's nothing he won't try that isn't already available as a CD by



someone else. Here's sound effects, overloaded sequencers, Dark Ambient, sampling, and Mego-styled droning. Whyte has no voice of his own, and is tentative; the attempts at pure noise are particularly half-assed. 'Pioggia Viola' sounds nice, but it just IS Christian Fennesz, start to finish. What a pointless release.

ED PINSENT 05/09/2005
www.acherecords.com

Short Circuits
The Rebel Sound of Hate & Fucking
NORWAY ELECTRO POLICY SOUND EP 001-2003 7" (2004)

Crap title, crap cover; music pretty much indifferent and nothing very special. It was done by Vegard Waske in Oslo, constructed on his computer. They tell me Waske is a 'hardcore legend', and who am I to disagree. Minimal ticky-tacky electro-beat art music is what he made here, using unpleasant sounds and shapeless white noise as his building bricks; from the resultant assemblage, melodies may struggle to emerge like wildflowers growing from the dung-heap. Like so much techno music disguised as art, there isn't a great deal of purpose to this, but at least it's only a single. The B-side sounds like a kid playing around with a friction-motor toy on a kitchen floor, all set to music. Quite an old one this, from 2001-2002.

ED PINSENT 26/08/2005
speakout@sindreime.com

Various Artists
Transient Travels
SWITZERLAND DOMIZIL 23 CD (2005)

A dreary and deeply pretentious electronica comp, funded by Pro Helvetia arts money, and themed on the idea of train travel. It's only saved from total hideousness by presence of Hecker. His 20-minute piece 'Inverted Henon Map III / Double Scroll' has an excellent evil, twisted sound, and feels like 20 pounds of radioactive taffy being pulled on the hook of technology. The dynamics Hecker comes up with are just insane. The complex subject matter is something to do with advanced mathematics and stochastics; far too deep for me! He had some help with computer programming for this one, which is surprising given his knowledge of music-making software, so this alone is testament to the complexity of the work. I wonder if he's 'playing' a map? You can probably turn virtually any digital information into soundfiles these days, and the advances in Geographical Information Systems of the last few years beggar belief…whatever the method, he gives us a good roary noise and harsh and shrill bursts of static, fizzing energy that fire out of your speakers like red hot sparks from jumping jacks and catherine wheels.

Remainder of CD is pap, featuring tunes and 'ideas' on the train travel subject, and proving to be a worthless update on territory already covered (and far more effectively) by Kraftwerk's *Trans-Europe Express*. Contributions come from Jasch (ie Jan Schacher), Ilios, Marcus Maeder, AGF and COH. AGF's piece has something to do with daydreaming on the train to pass the time away; to hear him talk, you'd think he to hear him talk, you'd think he invented the idea single-handed! COH simply imitates the sound of a train electronically; I'd rather hear the actual thing, instead of this wretched 'interpretation' of it. There's a pile of unreadable 'artspeak' guff in the booklet, most of which we can blame on the shit-for-brains curators – who, it turns out, were Jasch and Maeder. When you see grandiose 're-definitions' of perfectly ordinary terms – eg 'transient' – printed on the back cover, you know you're in for trouble. This is often what passes for 'culture' these days; patronising pseudo-intellectual twats who tell us everything we already know, but do it in a verbose way hoping thereby to conceal their lack of original ideas. Definitely, this is a process that should be resisted. Start by ignoring this tedious CD.

ED PINSENT 19/08/2005
www.domizil.ch
www.transienttravels.net
www.wnmd04.ch

Numbers Game

Chris Korda and The Church of Euthanasia

Six Billion Humans Can't Be Wrong
GERMANY INTERNATIONAL DEEJAY GIGOLO RECORDS EFA 29525-2 CD (1999)

This record makes plentiful use of one of my favourite John Oswald Plunderphonic gimmicks: a second or two of music fed through a computer and split into hundreds of overlapping fragments of sound, producing a kind of aural kaleidoscope effect. Oswald used it to halt Carly Simon in her tracks, slowing time down to a tiny fraction of its normal speed, splitting the musical atom. A bit like that 'bullet time' effect you see so often now in films.

Admittedly, at that level of granularity it tends to produce a very similar output whatever musical source you feed into it. But Chris Korda takes a more leisurely and open-ended approach to the process, gradually revealing a whole word or phrase over the course of a couple of minutes, panning forwards and backwards through the words, and constructing some beautiful superimpositions and juxtapositions of spoken sound.

And for the first few minutes of this CD I thought I might be in for a whole album of juicy musique concrète vocals along these lines. It swiftly became clear that this was little more than a case of 'guess the catchphrase', and that musical matters play second fiddle here to Korda's big *non-musical* message.

You'll have gathered that the title of the album refers to the current population of the planet Earth, and is intended to be ironic: as far as Korda is concerned, Six Billion Humans is wrong wrong wrong! Perhaps he thinks we're all like the shallow characters portrayed by guest vocalists Chicks on Speed in the title track: they matter-of-factly list the objects that form the substance of their lives and ambitions – a beer, a cigarette, a baby, a new car, etc – and reveal their mindset in a series of short phrases ('The world revolves around me', 'Where's my lunch?', 'Throw it away', 'We'll never stop living this way'). These are fed through the aforementioned process and looped as if to emphasise the unwitting rut that is the characters' existence. Musically this is brilliant - the Chicks' broken vocals integrate perfectly with some stuttering programmed percussion to form a fascinating rhythm track, which develops organically over 6 minutes and is capped imaginatively by a lively squeaky toy duet.

The presence of CoS, who've made a career out of portraying airheaded fashionistas, might lead you to believe this is lightweight stuff but, for better or for worse, Chris Korda's agenda has some substance and history to it. He's the head of the Church of Euthanasia, a US-based 'education foundation' dedicated to population control. Korda styles himself as a preacher who spreads his ideas through sermons, a website and dance records such as this one, and has garnered a reputation as a somewhat controversial alt-culture figure. His philosophy seems to run like this: the planet is overpopulated, resources are running out, humans are destroying the environment, and the solution to all these problems is to reduce the numbers involved. Fewer people = fewer demands on our resources = fewer problems. So, according to the Church of Euthanasia, we can all do our bit to improve matters by refusing to procreate, and by encouraging others to do the same. Or we can go even further. As the title of one track succinctly puts it, 'Save the Planet: Kill Yourself'.

In theory I'm all for political content in music, but in practice so much of it preaches to the converted and leaves no room for discussion. This is no exception. The title track is as close as Korda gets to successful use of musical techniques to tackle his subject, since he draws you into a world he has created and makes you consider it, even if the result may ultimately be to reject the simplistic terms in which he frames the picture. But elsewhere he just resorts to diatribe, a sure sign that, when it comes down to it, he's unwilling or unable to build a convincing argument for his ideology. Trotting out slogans and ready-made points of view is easy; engaging people artistically is much more difficult. He just assumes you will see the wisdom of his words or else be offended by them (either result being judged a successful outcome, I don't doubt).

Korda hectors the listener in a variety of transparent and crass ways: If you thought Gary Clail had taken humourless political sloganeering as low as it could go, think again! On one track he enlists a computer-processed alien voice to ask pertinent questions ('Why do your leaders lie to you? Why do so many of you believe these lies? Explain your strange customs'). The alien is no doubt intended to represent the voice of reasoned objectivity, but is clearly just a mouthpiece for Korda's own questions. 'Buy' attempts to parody the hidden messages in advertising, using reassuring and saccharine voices to narrate adverts that have been reduced to their sub-text ('Consume. Be happy. Buy more') - a hackneyed conceit familiar to us from countless dystopian sci-fi flicks. I wonder if Korda realises the irony in using the very same technique to put across his own ideas, in the aforementioned 'Save the Planet: Kill Yourself'. By his own logic he implicates himself as just another shifty rube attempting to brainwash the masses. Furthermore you've got to ask whether, in treating the public as mindless consumers who will lap up anything they're told, he's no better than the people in power that he protests against.

Korda is keen to present himself as transgressive and extreme (he's a cross-dresser natch, and much of the material on the Church's website seems to have been included only to 'shock the squares'). But before we dismiss him as just another crank, it's worth remembering that all manner of artists and musicians have been complaining about 'too many people!' for years. And if you scratch the surface you'll find his philosophy has much in common with mainstream thinking on the subject. Consider liberal newspapers such as *The Guardian* where population control is routinely and uncontroversially trotted out as a solution to the problems of the third world. Or high profile agencies / NGOs such as the Optimum Population Trust (whose campaigns have been fronted by Sir David Attenborough), which explicitly calls for the world's population to be cut by half.

What sets the Church of Euthanasia apart is that they follow this thinking to its logical conclusion, by offering up their own lives for the 'greater good'. That said, they don't walk the walk – suicide is 'optional' apparently, and as I far as I know Korda still inhabits this planet six years after the release of this record. This tacitly acknowledges an internal flaw in the philosophy: in order to popularise an idea, you need to promote it and argue on its behalf, and to do that you need to be er… alive.

Despite what they'd like you to believe, population isn't a simple numbers game. Even the apparently clear-cut matter of non-renewable resources is not as straightforward as it may seem. In the 1970s environmentalists confidently predicted, on the basis of contemporary usage, that many of our natural resources would become scarce within a decade, but in fact the opposite happened and they became more plentiful, as more of them were discovered and ways were found of exploiting them more efficiently. (For some striking historical examples of this, read *The Sceptical Environmentalist*, Bjorn Lomborg, Cambridge University Press, 2001*).*

When radicals and the mainstream are saying the same thing, something is up. And all versions of this outlook share a common yet highly questionable assumption: that the planet has a natural population limit which has been exceeded. In this they miss two crucial factors in determining how many people the planet can support - politics and economics – or on a more practical level, how well we organise ourselves. How can we improve the way we do that? For starters, it would take a lot of imagination and creative thinking – the very things that a responsible-minded artist could contribute to political debate.

I guess we all can think of *individual* people that the world would be better off without, but when people can blithely suggest that the world would be a better place if vast swathes of the population didn't exist, it's clear that a dim view of humanity has taken hold. And I suspect that, when it comes down to it, even *one* human is too many for some people.

This album's misanthrophic sentiments may stink but it is still possible to recommend the title track on musical grounds. As for the other tracks, Korda's skewed techno music is mildly entertaining for a while, but by the time you reach the end, you feel like someone has locked you in a studio and is forcing you to listen to their extensive library of MIDI demonstration loops. If you find yourself losing the will to live, you know what to do – change the record.

HARLEY RICHARDSON 19/10/2005

http://www.churchofeuthanasia.org

The DISCURATOR'S DEN

Idea Fire Company
Stranded
USA SWILL RADIO 024 LP (2005)

The first published results from this modified and expanded version of the group; the duo of Scott Foust and Karla Borecky now enhanced by addition of Jessi Swinson and Meara O'Reilly. Both girls add their voices and keyboards to that of Borecky, leaving Mr Foust free to concentrate on his more 'musique concrète' styled activities, of live radio, tapework and live electronics. Surprisingly, early listens disappointed me, but now I think this LP contains some of most limpid and beautiful musical moments ever released in the name of IFCO. The culturally-alert consumer will note references the jocular Mr Foust has made, to align this release with the 'classic' 1970s work of Roxy / Bowie, but the references are mainly contained in the titles; not so much in the music, which may be intended as homage to Messrs Ferry and Bowie but is so abstracted that the only place it might fit in is on side two of the *Low* or *"Heroes"* LPs. As ever, each track is a strong self-contained statement, evidence of the judicious selection and editing which is one of this band's hallmarks.

This LP opens with 'Artificial', starting with a relentless chirping like an annoying electronic parrot sounding off against a low droning hum; it took me about three listens before this work began to cohere. There are some fascinating but subtle group dynamics at work; at least three lines of minimal synth playing, working to an unfathomable logic, which seems at first hesitant and full of odd gaps. In fact it creates some amazing and unexpected patterns, if you can just seek them out with your roving ears. Radio and tape-work is audible beneath; there is further melodic and chirping miniaturist filigree work on top, added as necessary, About half-way through it resolves into a very simple melody of sorts, with one trilling synth 'responding' to the other.

The longest track at 12:53, 'Artificial', sets a template of sorts for the LP, in terms of the basic arrangement of high sounds and low sounds. This new group dynamic emerges very strongly after you've heard the whole LP enough times. The distinction between Foust's work, and the remainder of the group, becomes extremely clear and sharp. Foust's contributions are low-register, fragmented, and contain vaguely 'narrative' aspects; they are slightly dark and neurotic. The synth and voice orchestra contributions are friendly, melodic and abstracted; they tend to occupy the higher-register scales.

This voice choir surfaces on 'Heroes', the second track; tentative wordless vocalising opens it. The simple melodies are spun out against an 'industrial-lite' backdrop and strangely swooping synths for about 9 minutes. This work is so half-formed as to be almost floating in space; a bass note underpins its delicate structure. Around the 5:50 mark it grows that shade darker, acquiring a menacing clanking rhythm which may have been produced by a slowed-down percussion or piano tape.

'Wünderwäffen' opens side two and continues the vaguely worrying tone; it includes an extended tape loop of highly abnormal musical sounds, a 'helicopter' wobbling synth sound, and something resembling a slowed-down factory siren. The group appear to be navigating the strange and unexpected swells of a deep and sluggish ocean. Like about half of the music on the LP, this one doesn't really develop into anything much, but stays in one place for about 11 minutes. 'Stranded I' showcases the acceptable face of IFCO, combining beautiful singing voices, tapes of birdsong, and an atmospheric drone. Some traces of German Lieder samples are barely discernible, plucked from Foust's extensive collection. One synth plays a rising and falling anti-melody. This one delivers the 'airy and spacey' vibe which IFCO have made all their own, ever since their first release; keeping the listener in a suspended state of bliss for nearly five minutes, the tape cuts off suddenly and brings you down to earth.

LP closes with 'Stranded II', a work which incorporates those vaguely 'narrative' elements as mentioned, and the grittier side of the IFCO equation. Radio noise, vague thumping, subtle tapework manipulation; sound effects, a chiming clock, fragments of speaking voices. A gentle and subtle synth accompanies this clever radiophonic composition. The delicacy and sensitivity of this material is remarkable; it could be obliterated by one gust of wind, one feels, yet retains a wiry strength at its core.

Stranded is perhaps simpler and maybe even less ambitious in its imaginative reach than previous IFCO works; but it's also totally different to the three other releases under the IFCO name. The new lineup is slightly unsure of what it can do, and may come across as tentative in places; but when they all lock in together, the combination is unbeatable.

ED PINSENT 26/10/2005

Idea Fire Company are interviewed this issue.

Dungen
Dungen: 1999 – 2001
SWEDEN SUBLIMINAL SOUNDS SUBCD16 CD(2005)

For those who missed out on getting the group's first album, here it comes again (or most of it anyway) on CD together with some previously unreleased material spanning a two-year period. Dungen's music treads a thin line between kitschy retro-psychedelic pop / rock that sometimes emits a cheesy flavour, and some very pleasant and fresh improvisation with hints of jazz done on analogue synths and other instruments similar to those made popular by musicians in the late 1960s / early 1970s. We get long warbly synth and guitar tones with smart percussion rhythms, rather like Pink Floyd without the earnestness and angst jamming with a not-very free jazz group; we find cheery Hammond organs and similar keyboards jostling with floaty woodwinds suggesting pastoral folk and snatches of field recordings of birdsong; we even find sitars in places lending the requisite exotic Indian flavour. Tunes and harmonies the Beatles and the Beach Boys never got around to recording make their appearance - sung in Swedish! The overall impression is that of a parallel universe that happens to spill over into ours, allowing a bunch of young Swedes who have come together in the manner of Godspeed You Black Emperor or the current Finnish psychedelic folk network to pick up ideas about improv and combining genres from our dimension and travel back to their own world where the late 60s counterculture and soundtrack have only just begun. Generally the instrumental passages are far better than the sung sections: then Dungen forget they're playing to a retro-psychedelic music audience and take flight in a neo-psychedelic world of their own where time matters not at all; the music flies through rich sparkling guitar and keyboard chords, soothing flute and robust drumming. The mix of musical genres with all their subcultural connotations and evocations is quite a heady brew! When Dungen sing however, everything seems to plummet to earth heavily and becomes all very self-conscious. A lot of the original psychedelic rock music actually required a fairly good singing voice which is absent among

the Dungen vocalists so they tend to sound quite thin and silly. The passages of human warbling usually don't last long apart from one piece in about the fourth to fifth minute of track 3 where the singing sounds excruciating amid 'heavy' music with a melody nicked from the Beatles circa 1967 - 68.

Dungen seem to sound like several bands at once: a bit of Allman Brothers perhaps (I think that might please one of the journalists at *The Wire*), some Beach Boys maybe, a bit of Pink Floyd somewhere, some free jazz, some folk and bits of cheesy lounge pop. For a brief moment I find myself even thinking Aavikko without the cheap Casio gadgets, Masayo Asahara (ha!) and a bit of Steamboat Switzerland. Don't worry if you don't 'get' the concept of Dungen: the retro-psych idea is but a launch-pad to explore realms and realise potentials that always existed in the psychedelic rock / free jazz music of over 30 years and the associated instruments but which had to wait for the ideas and worldview that could release them. As a result Dungen's music doesn't sound all that dated or too twee. (True, the music's nowhere near the calibre of Parsson Sound / International Harvester or the famous German Kosmische Musik

rock groups and the novelty value may wear off fairly quickly.) Just sit or lie back and let Dungen fill your head with 'old' music anew!

JENNIFER HOR 03/08/2005
www.subliminalsounds.se
www.dungen-music.com

Various Artists
Time and Relative Dimensions in Space
USA REBIS 005 CD (2005)

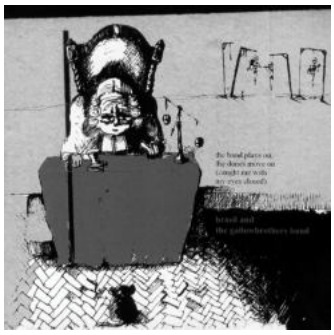
A very good compilation on the same label that hosts work of American combo Number None, who also appear on it…the title indicates that the area of interest resides in instrumental, long-form, noodling and discursive noise of all stripes. Actually not all stripes, but at least it takes the time to observe that many bands are opting for 11-minute recorded workouts as a matter of course. Which once again adds weight to my theory that we're returning to the good old days of prog rock. *TARDIS* would thus serve as a good introduction to the work of all these bands and may want to prompt curious listeners to investigate further their recorded output. Also works quite well as a good listen in its own right, although it isn't very coherently planned, amounting to little more than five unusual but essentially unrelated sound episodes.

Number None work up a good monolithic slab of heavy noise on 'The Pole I'm Farthest From'. Having created a vast and dense weight, they simply keep adding more to it. Imagine a series of blocks of titanium, relentlessly loaded onto a big board by a conveyor belt. As listener, you are trapped beneath this board, being crushed into a flattened pulp. What a way to buy it, eh? The Skaters from San Francisco turn in a cut called 'Fleeing Pavilions for Celestial Clouds'. Lovely title, non? A bunch of tape loops, badly-played recorders and humming voices, all belted out in that peculiar half-running, half-floating manner which they have already made their own. They keep to a highly irregular pace and suffuse every moment with unusual and surprising sounds. A great level of intensity is attained, mainly through use of acoustic instruments, making this one of their finest hours.

Jim Haynes, another USA West-Coaster, takes a break from his occasional collaborative efforts and goes solo on 'A Sense of Levitation'. Accordingly he creates a strange interlude of hovering sounds, comprising mostly an oscillating drone with samples and other unknown debris. Succeeds once again in maintaining his façade of impenetrability with this enigmatic and inconclusive piece. He's sooner die than reveal his sources. Not bad at all. My Cat Is An Alien are the Italian duo currently creating a stir across international stages with their guitars and space toys. On 'Alien Substratum 1.0 / 1,2' they exhibit a more urgent tone than you find on some of their recent more soporific recordings. There's a guitar loop that's just plain neurotic, spastic strums and clonks, all suspended in a cosmic vacuum. They also have great fun with the space echo device.

Tarpis Tula (the Volcanic Tongue house band) close the comp with 'Lonely Woman'. The vocalist sings her fragmented notes over a minimal backing where guitar (I assume) resembles a music box. Everything is drenched in studio echo. The effect is like a dream-memory of an old torchy jazz standard, rebuilt by the mind of someone driven to distraction by loneliness. Chilling.

ED PINSENT 12/09/2005
www.imaginaryyear.com/rebis

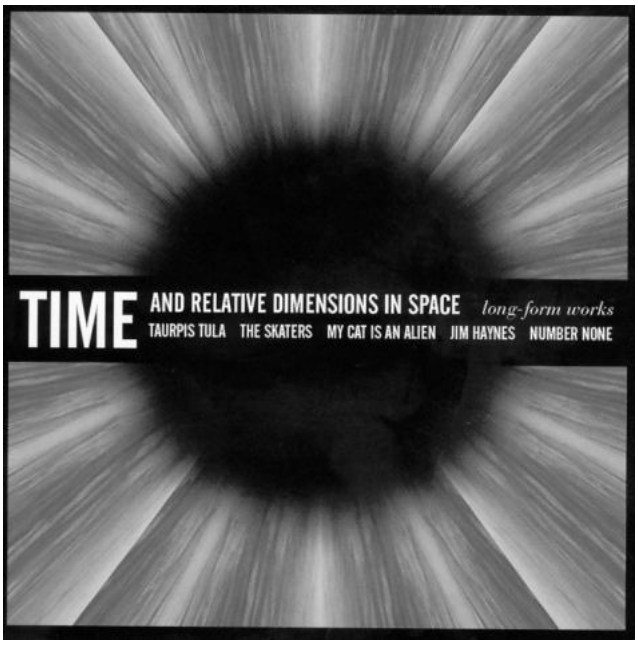


Brasil and the Gallowbrothers Band
The Band Plays On, the Dunes Move On (Caught Me With My Eyes Closed)
USA LAST VISIBLE DOG LVD071 CD (2005)

This almost impossibly titled album comes from an almost impossibly titled Polish band whose members bear equally eccentric monikers like Mirt, Adalbert Lake, Pat O'Steo, and best of all, Father Pieter de Drummy. This, combined with Mirt's medieval-flavoured black and white cover drawings, gives the distinct impression of a group that is quite literally out of time. Whether this is solely due to their eastern European origin is unclear. What they do seem to have succeeded in doing is creating their own particular world of sound to inhabit, one that seems to exist nowhere in particular and yet is most definitely not of the here and now.

It is the sort of music that is difficult to pin down with any degree of certainty, but it might be best conceived of as fragmented, dark pop with whispered, barely-audible vocals, jazz instrumentation, field recordings and incidental noise. Of course, the notion of this being in any way 'merely' pop music hardly begins to scratch the surface. Just when you think that the band might be about to break into fully-fledged song, they turn away from the obvious at the last moment, choosing obscurity every time. The overall mood they manage to create is an archaic, somewhat dusty one, in which a sense of magic continues to exist.

The main instigators of proceedings seem to be a Dominic Savio and the



above-mentioned Mirt, also a member of another obscure Polish outfit, One Inch of Shadow. This album was originally released as a CDR on Mirt's own Catscan Records label. The cover mentions that it was recorded during 'several gigs on the roofs' although for better or for worse it doesn't sound particularly live in any respect. One can however easily imagine this bunch of forlorn jesters performing on some deserted rooftop under the stars, their only known audience being the creatures of the night.

AARON ROBERTSON
POB 2631, Providence, RI 02906, USA
lastvisibledog@gmail.com
www.lastvisibledog.com

The Lickets
Fake Universe Man
USA INTERNATIONAL CORPORATION NO NUMBER CD (2005)

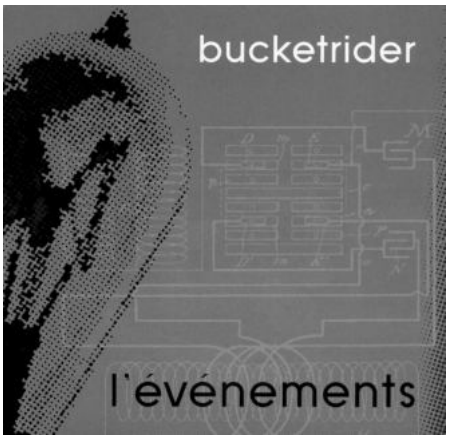
Quite an oddity here I must say. The tiny American record label that produced it is pretending, in very tongue-in-cheek way, to be a big multinational corporation. The work arrived packaged in a beautiful printed envelope (an artefact which I'll be hanging onto) with a carefully-assembled press release package to bolster the far-flung fictions which it alludes to. The whole thing is practically a work of mail art. For a CDR, it's sumptuously packaged in lots of colour artworks. The music on the disc is credited to Mitch Greer and Rachel Smith, with some assistance from Jeff Arkenberg and Scott Marks. All tracks segue on this electronic-sampledelica concept album; the music is slippery, clever, enigmatic poppy instrumental music. Editing, sampling, composition and playing are all seamless; the detail is amazing in its quest for perfection. The music is upbeat and bouncy, yet somehow rather sinister…

It won't take you long to spot the sardonic and sarcastic subtext at work here, associated with a theme not unlike that of *The Truman Show* or *The Stepford Wives*, with their visions of impossibly perfect (and horrifyingly bland) suburban societies. Titles such as 'Shopping in the Future' and 'Magnificent New Terminal Building' should clue you in, if the CD title doesn't. File alongside your Sudden Sway records. This is the soundtrack to a nightmarish corporate video, or the TV advert for a bleak New Town development. Construct your own visuals, or use those which have been provided for you; the front cover artwork is a photo of a pleasant park scene, rendered eerie by its excessive red tinting, the incongruous presence of oriental statues, and superimposed lighting effects. The inside artwork is very odd; an impossibly tangled forest scene, all trees and branches coloured a vivid bright turquoise, with a tatty collage insert of a bird perched on a human hand.

So far, a tremendously enjoyable and skilfully-presented offbeat concoction; only one track, 'Cat Runs a Company', outstays its welcome, weighing in at 20 minutes with an unimaginative rinky-dink riff that quickly turns into a boring plod. Shame, because the remainder of the CD is an object lesson in concision. It begins and ends with birdsong; a charming curio which deserves investigation.

ED PINSENT 12/09/2005
www.internationalcorporation.net

Bucketrider
L'événements



AUSTRALIA DR JIM'S RECORDS DRJIM35 CD (2004)

Bucketrider are a contemporary combo heavily influenced by jazz and other contemporary musical forms, and are based in Melbourne, Australia. They like to play it loud and punchy, and have borrowed the term 'punk-jazz' to describe their aesthetic; I think this term was originally devised by writer Ben Watson to describe the abrasive and inventive sorties of UK leader Simon H Fell (particularly when tenor player Alan Wilkinson was involved). Here, two of the main members David Brown and Tim O'Dwyer compose a set of lively instrumentals. Brown has written four jazz compositions, which on this CD frame the 'centrepiece' work called 'L'événements', which is in 12 movements and is credited to O'Dwyer. This centrepiece has an intellectual twist, depicting in music various events associated with the May-June 1968 Paris uprisings, when workers and students nearly managed to cause the collapse of civilisation, or something. According to the press release, Paris 1968 marked 'the death of modernism'.

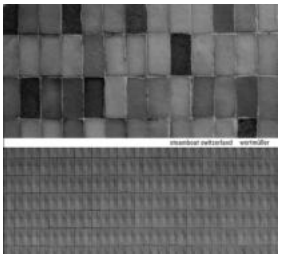
Bucketrider are a surprisingly small combo – it just sounds like a big band because they play so loud, are not afraid to use amplification, go for a very big drum sound, and lots of electric guitars; the rest of it is two sax players, one trombone, and one oboe. Philip Samartzis, the ubiquitous experimental Australian, brings in his AKS synthi to good effect on the more chaotic tracks. Don't think Soft Machine, rather think of the Charlie Haden Liberation Orchestra, or any one of Carla Bley's big bands (for example the talented crew that recorded *Escalator Over The Hill*). It's hard to not to enjoy and get caught up in their rollicking sound, very beefy and muscular.

The 12 'événements' pieces all have 'clever' French titles, referring not only to the political and activist dimensions of May 1968 ('Anarchisme' and 'L'Enrages' for example), but also to cultural developments such as Surrealism, Dada, Lettrisme and the Cobra Movement. I wasn't aware all of these were directly associated with May 1968, but I'd better re-read my Greil Marcus…the music seems to be inspired by these titles, as it seeks to interpret this upheaval of radicalism in musical terms and with appropriate arrangements. The 'surrealist' piece for example, sounds slightly – erm - odd. And the works depicting 'anarchy' are free and loose, in an extremely literal way – I'm sure you can imagine the freewheeling blurty and chaotic sounds that O'Dwyer sees fit to score in this context. Not a bad record. But you have to ask how deeply these Australians are connected with this very European theme; they can't pretend that it's their own culture they're making music about. (Or indeed using their own music to do it, since Jazz is essentially an Afro-American music). It feels more like an intellectual commentary on radical politics, acquired through reading about it in libraries, rather than through living with it. On the other hand, it could be argued that Situationism has evolved into a significance that has spread everywhere (just ask Scott Foust), and jazz music likewise.

ED PINSENT 17/07/2005
www.drjimsrecords.com.au

Fuchsia
Fuchsia
ITALY NIGHT WINGS RECORDS NWRCD 02 (2003)

I found this CD reissue of the early 70s English folk pop record while travelling through the Forced Exposure website one day (as you do) and was intrigued by the overwrought description so I thought, let's check this record out and see if it lives up to the hype ... Well, it's not as dark and cruel as that Comus record I reviewed in TSP#13 though they both came out about the same time but neither is it completely sunshiney pop: the printed lyrics tell of lost opportunities and resignation ('A Tiny Book'), alienation ('Just Anyone'), potential war ('Another Nail') and dreary lives ('The Nothing Song'), among other things. So, no, it's not quite what the breathless resume claims but it has its own whimsical charm: poppy tunes that are unpredictable and refuse to conform to the usual verse-chorus-verse-chorus arrangement that was prevalent in much folk / pop / rock at the time with the result that most songs have more than their legal share of hummable tunes and hooks that embed themselves forever in the brain (constable, these people should have been arrested years ago for having too many good ideas and melodies on the one disc); and the combination of a string section (three girls playing violins and viola) and a rock band set-up (three boys playing guitars-n-drums) allows the music to explore instrumental by-ways and moods that otherwise would have been impossible. Sweeping passages of strings quickly turn into liquid runs of acoustic guitar which might then run into quite vigorous light rock workouts, often within the same song; above all this, guitarist singer Tony Durant's rather plain but slightly girlish vocals lend the music a suitably fey yet quite straight-forward air with the effect of pushing the music to the fore, though the singing is never incidental.



Overall, the band's style is balanced between the music and the vocals, between darkness and sunshine, between folk and psychedelia, between rock and chamber music: seemingly a complex act for any group to pull off, let alone a bunch of university kids! Obviously this was all too much of a radical concept for the music industry to handle in those days: although Fuchsia did sign up to a record label, the band appears to have been neglected by the label (though perhaps the label did not have the resources to promote it) and the members went their separate ways out of frustration. Tony Durant finished his studies and in the late 70s emigrated to Australia where he ended up producing records for that country's late 70s punk icon Dave 'Suburban Boy' Warner and then went on to write music for advertisements and films. A small world indeed as they say!

All the music on this album is good with no filler and sounds very fresh: of course it's of its time and some may be able to pinpoint the period in which it was made, yet it never sounds twee or precious and its juxtaposition of a strings section and a rock combo doesn't seem forced (in contrast with more famous English groups of the period that tried the same idea), mainly because Durant took care to incorporate the strings as an important aspect of the music's structure and did not treat them as add-ons. My favourite track is 'Just Anyone' which actually doesn't feature any violins but seems a darker piece than the rest due to the use of a minor key at times and it points in a more psychedelic direction for the band. Alas and alack, 'twas not to be so and I almost find myself shedding a tear at the group's wasted potential though Durant's subsequent career demonstrates that when one door closes another can open and England's loss eventually became Australia's gain. That man was born to make his musical mark somehow! (And just to tie off the Dave Warner connection, Warner himself found greater fame and fortune as a novelist specialising in crime fiction and scriptwriter for TV and film.) As with Comus's first album reissued on CD, the Fuchsia CD reissue features the original album cover artwork.

JENNIFER HOR 20/06/2005
www.nightwings.org
info@nightwings.org

Steamboat Switzerland
Wertmüller
GERMANY GROB 655 CD (2005)

Further enjoyable prog and jazz-influenced music from this talented instrumental organ trio; six of the cuts have added lyrics and song components. Dominik Blum is the organist here, playing a vintage 1971 Hammond organ. Very much like early ELP, Quatermass, Egg. All the things we were told to hate about prog rock (for instance, 'clever' time signatures, virtuosity, speed of playing) have here been redeemed and updated by this trio into a slightly more modernist context which is bound to appeal to contemporary audiences. Nothing too 'excessive' though – the longest cut is 6 minutes – and they have a lot of energy and spiky twists to each workout that mostly would not have been in evidence 30 years ago, one suspects. Personally I prefer the all-instrumental cuts – the lyrics (written by Michael Lentz) are unmemorable, and the voice is very Germanic in delivery, coming close to the mannered 'lieder' style. Also interesting to find that the record's namesake, Michael Wertmüller, is the producer, and wrote all the music hereon. The CD does indeed have a very composed feel; tight, almost airless in its perfection. 'Austere and exact' is how the press release describes it; Herr Michael not only wrote everything, he took part in the recording sessions and oversaw every little detail, including that of the lamentable text parts. If you recall, Wertmüller is that modernist composer who was responsible for an intensely complex CD called *Die Zeit, eine Gebrauchsanweisung* (also on the GROB label), reviewed last ish...and what a crazy double-time fest that turned out to be. Wertmüller is clearly a man who likes his music the same way he likes his breakfast marmalade – sweet, coarse-cut, and spread thickly on a doorstep, provided it arrives on the breakfast table in an exquisite piece of Dresden china. 'No digital sound sources on this record,' is the proud boast of the team; 'all music handcrafted'. With some slightly more reflective pieces in middle of set, this is mostly very urgent, angular and energised music – with perhaps a certain influence from J S Bach in the precision and the mathematics of it all (not in the organ sound). Effective, punchy, tautly-composed instrumentals.

ED PINSENT 31/07/2005
www.churchofgrob.com

Erik Ian Walker / Marit Brook-Kothlow
I Have Never Told You
USA BOTTOMFEEDER
BOT-FEED03 CD (2004)

There have been many chroniclers of the great American 'experience' over the years, mostly literary, all seeking to capture something of what it supposedly means to live in the land of the free. Most countries don't go in for such nationalistic enterprises, but that probably comes with the territory. Faulkner, Hemingway, Fitzgerald, Mailer, Neil Young perhaps, even early Bruce Spingsteen (who, may I suggest, would also have Young's level of credibility, were it not ironically for the commercial success of 'Born in the USA'); all have endeavoured to do so. Hoping perhaps to join this group are Walker and Brook-Kothlow.

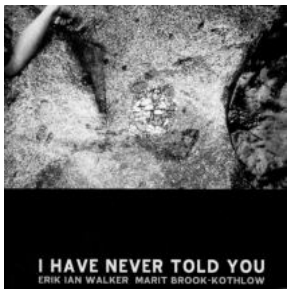
The album is an atmospheric one, possibly a reflection of the large expanse of country from which it hails. It contains a multitude of instrumentation; the strings alone probably earn it the misleading label 'cinematic' from many. It does go a little far to say, as they do, that this is 'a soundtrack that needs no film.' It is comprised of some twenty tracks; small fragments that seem intended to add up to a greater whole. The main problem is that they don't quite manage it. Collectively they sound a little like underdeveloped ideas that could have used more work. The album ends with what is, presumably, a comedy version of 'Für Elise', played in faux-primitive style, and renamed 'Furry Lisa'.

John Steinbeck, another native of the northern Californian, wrote many short stories detailing the lives of the men and woman of the area, mostly the rural poor, of which there were plenty in this part of the United States in the early twentieth century. They're hard tales, full of detailed observation and wonderful characters. Those days have gone of course, and the images brought to mind by this CD are not of those of the early settlers who broke the land and lived in ramshackle buildings, but of IT refugees from the big West Coast metropolises leaning back in newly-vintage rocking chairs, overlooking their recently purchased lifestyle block, all the while sucking a Bud and downloading some more I-tunes on their WIFI connection.

AARON ROBERTSON
225 Andover St, San Francisco, CA 94110, USA
info@wackoworldmusic.com
www.wackoworldmusic.com

Julien Ottavi / Dion Workman
Misenlian
USA ERSTWHILE RECORDS
045 CD (2005)

A real bit of monumental minimalism for you here – La Monte Young may



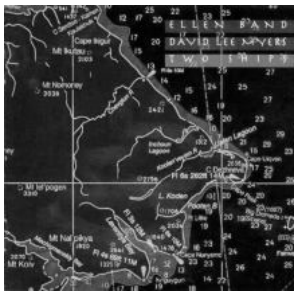
as well hand over his mantle right now. This record is pretty much a big cloud of digital 'nothingness' which drifts overhead, clings to your clothing like a damp mist, and goes on to settles everywhere over the land causing uncertainty and vague feelings of doubt wherever it goes. Quite an achievement therefore. In a way it's kind of interesting to find this on the Erstwhile label and it might be one of their most 'challenging' releases yet; seemingly a further refinement and narrowing down in the line of electronic music releases on this label from last 2-3 years. For example the Flirts record, or *What A Wonderful World* – compared with this one, the former is positively baroque in its detail. This is total process work, and very computer based; the two musicians did it using free audio software, and other than that it's a work that won't reveal its secrets. At 55 minutes of relentlessly doing only one thing (with the possibility of gradual change over time), this airy droner is one to file alongside John Hudak's wonderful record this issue, another piece of furniture music for you style-conscious listeners, a sophisticated background hum for the 21st century set. Gently churning fridge-motor styled noises with a low

inaudible crackle, a continuous spread of 'bitstream' music with absolutely no life outside of the software used to author it. Gazing at the sleeve art in search of some relief from this intense sensation, I seem to see the city spread out below me. This made me think of the record as the soundtrack to reading *Eight Weeks in a Balloon.* I hover and drift wherever the currents may take me, yet the view remains exactly the same. This may not be exactly what writer Jules Verne had in mind, but then of course living in the 19th century he never had a computer – poor schmoe! A pointless, empty release of total vacuity – but also strangely beautiful in a way.

ED PINSENT 28/07/2005
www.erstwhilerecords.com

Ellen Band / David Lee Myers
Two Ships
USA POGUS PRODUCTIONS P21035-2
CD (2005)

This is unfortunately rather self-

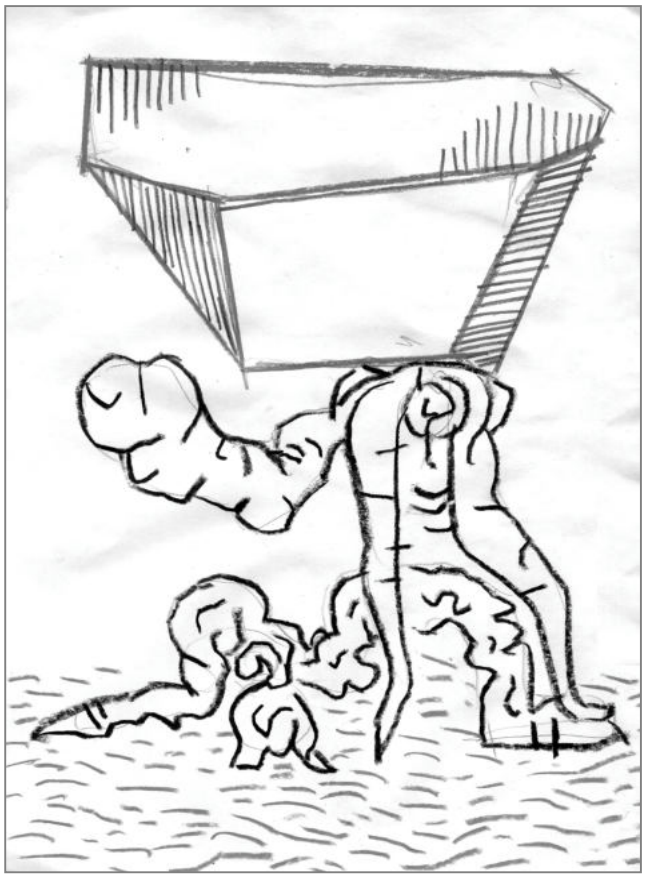


indulgent electronic music from a couple of Americans experimenters who decided to collaborate together. There's nothing wrong with a meeting of like minds, but currently the 'experimental' scene is getting to be a bit like late-1970s progressive rock, with its 'supergroups' and rock superstars, promiscuously hopping into musical projects with each other, and creating situations where egos can be mutually massaged. It can also result in music equally smug and pretentious as prog used to be. It's not good to hear such unchallenging and unsurprising music released in the name of 'experimental'.

David Lee Myers was a radical figure in the 1980s, with his feedback experiments; the timely reissue of those works by ReR Megacorp (see last issue) reminded us of his achievements. On evidence here at least, he now seems to have become soft-centred, indistinguishable from any other noodling electronica artiste. Ellen Band is an accomplished sound-artist, who works mostly in producing installations but had a good CD of field recording-type music on XI Records a few years ago. Inside the booklet, the pair of them engage in a self-satisfied dialogue in print, full of mutual back-slapping and pointless questions about their respective methods and performances. None of which bolsters or enhances the music, which is flabby and boring, all electronic bleeping and swishing. To top it all off, you get written descriptions of the process from Al Margolis which tell you next to nothing about what they actually did; rather they remind me of those silly descriptions printed on boxes of food from Sainsbury's, suggesting to you at great length how 'delicious' the food is without, of course, providing any hard information about the ingredients.

It dawns on you pretty quickly that there was no real need for these people to meet up, or make music together; they had no real shared ideas, nothing to say, no compatibility (unless you count their mutual ego-stroking). Still less need for any label to release such a flatulent blast of electronic hot air. This is the kind of thing that gives experimental music a bad name; it devalues the meaning of experimentation.

ED PINSENT 17/07/2005
pogal@pogus.com
www.pogus.com



The Chartists 2:
back by POPular demand!

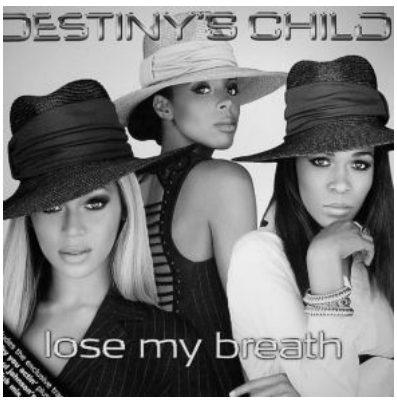
By Harley Richardson and Steve Bynghall

Dance pop

Destiny's Child
Lose My Breath
UK COLUMBIA 6754911
CD SINGLE (2004)

Destiny's Childs final album seems like an afterthought, somewhat secondary to both Beyonce and Kelly's solo careers. With only eleven songs on it (when many US R&B or pop acts often have sixteen tracks or so on) it appears to be rushed. Therefore their recent announcement of their split came as no surprise. Despite this, *Destiny Fufilled*'s opening track and lead single, 'Lose My Breath', is absolutely magnificent and better than anything on the *Survivor* album.

From the moment it starts the whole song is like being slapped violently across the chops. The intricate beats, which sound like a a



cross between a drum majorette competition and a flamenco evening, are underpinned by a powerful kick bass thud and topped by an evil-sounding series of hand claps. This only leaves space for a minimalist instrumentation – a low bass, a massive and repetitive two strikes of an orchestral hit, and an occasional foghorn of a low synth – but that's all you need. The louder you play it the better it sounds.

The lyrics deal with an inadequate man who is clearly going to be given his marching orders unless things improve in certain areas. It's a less than charming finger-pointing lyric, a call for man to be able to satisfy a woman's needs (which although never explicitly stated are clearly implied to be sexual). 'Can you keep up, baby boy? Make me lose my breath.' Some great breathing samples raise the tension. As ever the song is excellently sung and the girls sound suitably hacked off ('I'm starting to

believe that I'm way too much for you…'), be it with some sweet harmonising in appropriate places to keep you humming this in your head.

On 'Lose My Breath' something has to give and it's certainly not going to be Destiny's Child. The 'Child are always best when they are in men-bashing mode and this is their finest moment.

STEVE BYNGHALL

Milky
Just The Way You Are
UK MULTIPLY X CDMULTY87 CD SINGLE (2002)

'Sacrilege!' was the cry when my other half heard this one, as it brazenly lifts the gorgeous guitar riff from the Go-Betweens' classic single 'Streets of Your Town'. How dare they! But take no notice of Her Indoors. Italian producers Giordano Trivellato and Guiliano Sacchetto saw untapped potential in the riff and turned it into something quite different but in its own way equally wonderful.

The song's arrangement is deceptively simple and works because of opposites – there's tension created by the bass line pulling in a different direction to the rhythm guitar, and the power walk of a beat is at odds with the laconic singing. And not content with one great guitar line, there's also a second, a light touch of a solo that fills the gaps between the verses. If it's a steal, I'm not familiar with it – perhaps a Johnny Marr riff from an obscure Smiths track?

One hit wonder Milky was really Egyptian singer Sabrina Elahl aus Kassel. Why Milky? 'Milky, because I eat so gladly ice, milk ice.' It turns out that she didn't get to keep the name, and the producers have hired other singers to be Milky in recent years, but it's not known whether a demonstrable taste for iced milk was one of the recruitment criteria.

Milky's vocal is simple, direct, really high in the mix, and a classic. I'm really taken with her off-hand delivery of the song's wistful 'do do do' hook (or, the way she sings it, 'dur dur durrrrr'), her broad Middle Eastern accent, and her clumsy attempts at communicating in English ('the way you whisper me'). I've been trying to write this without saying the words 'sexy' or 'foreign exchange student'… too late.

HARLEY RICHARDSON

Britney Spears
Toxic
UK JIVE 8287662092 CD SINGLE (2004)

Somewhere on her descent from teenage pop queen to reality TV mum Britney Spears released this absolute belter of a single. Another product of unlikely pop product genius Cathy Dennis (working with Swedish writing team Jonback & Karlsson), it deserved to be a big hit and it reached number one in the UK and the USA. Although really a pop song it strays into R & B with those economic and crisp beats and that heavy acoustic guitar strum. Along with a moog-like bass line, the song also uses some fashionable Bollywood string arrangements as a hook-line. I've no idea if it's a sample or if it's a total cod-arrangement but it works superbly.

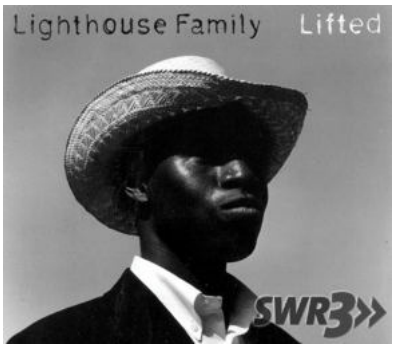
Britney's vocals have generally sounded quite weak on her singles, but here she sings the chorus in a very high register (her normal lower register is much lower in the mix) which removes the 'Larry the Lamb' qualities in her voice and is both surprising and instantly memorable. Reeling from this

you're taken off guard again by a cheeky tremolo guitar line which conjures up memories of the Pulp Fiction soundtrack.

Naturally the song is as catchy as hell, and the production of this single uses the full range of bass and treble to give it a cinematic quality. Easily as good as anything by her more critically-aclaimed ex Justin Timberlake, Britney's 'Toxic' is as near as you can get to a perfect pop single.

STEVE BYNGHALL

Trite and polite



The Lighthouse Family
Lifted
UK WILD CARD CARDD17 CD SINGLE (1995)

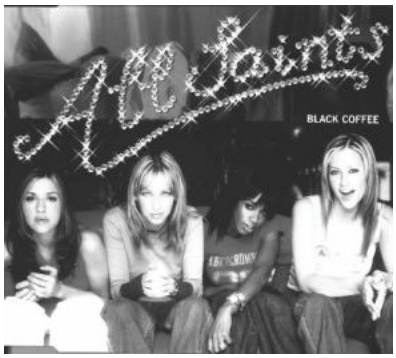
This song is many people's idea of hell. It does sound like the music from an insurance advert, and to some is an empty piece of plastic pop-soul, with trite semi-religious lyrics, a token gospel-esque choir appearing near the end, and flat instrumentation that sucks all the joy out of the music. As far as chart music goes, the Lighthouse Family have been subject to more hostility than most, and that's probably because they want to make 'serious' music. This is not a teenage pop record.

Two main elements make this a great record – a nifty set of chords which build up into a rousing chorus – and the fabulous voice of Tunde Baiyewu. The song's arrangement is embarrassingly bloodless and pleasant– and starting with a series of synthesised tom-toms never was going to set the heart racing. But the beautiful interplay between the main 'We could be lifted' vocal hook and the flick of the Spanish guitar riff is what counts here, and the song wins you over as it heads towards its climax.

Baiyewi's vocals are the aural equivalent of Hall's Soothers. I'm surprised not more has been made of his voice – when he sings about 'aches and pains' – you know he's there to remove them. His voice works best when the melody lines are simple and unhurried (not really much Mariah Carey-esque warbling here) – leaving the warmth of his voice to speak for itself. It makes me wonder what his spoken voice his like. I'm sure there could be some voice-over work beckoning. The lyrics are unconvincing and cliché-ridden ('But it ain't long before I long for you / Like a ray of hope coming through the blue') but in this context just contribute to the sense of calm joy that runs through the song.

'Lifted' has cheered me up when I needed it on more than one occasion. I ask you to get rid of your prejudices and give it another chance.

STEVE BYNGHALL



All Saints
Black Coffee
UK LONDON RECORDS LONCD454 CD SINGLE (2000)

Although these days the knives are out for the Appleton Sisters, and Shaznay's solo career has so far amounted to nothing, All Saints were once seen as a refreshing antidote to manufactured pop groups. This led to the outfit being portrayed as better than they really were. They only actually had four or five decent singles and a listen to their greatest hits is a fairly unsatisfactory experience.

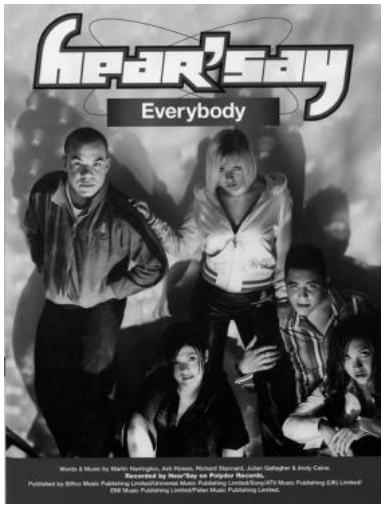
Whilst its generally accepted that their best song is 'Pure Shores' (also from their second album, and produced by William Orbit), the follow-up single 'Black Coffee' is a sublime little song that is quirky, beautiful, playful and sad. It has both musical and lyrical depth and a great vocal performance from the group.

It starts and ends aggressively with a Gary Numan-esque synth riff. In between the song switches to a lighter but busy coffee-lounge drumbeat, before later accelerating up a notch to something a little more danceable. There's lots of bleep-style synths, swathed in reverb, which perhaps dates it a little to the nineties, but these work very well in combination with the multiple harmonies plastered all over the track, giving it a dream-like quality. At other times they're used to build towards the hook or to give extra resonance to the lyrics. The multiple parts of the song and the complexity of the arrangement means the song can sustain many repeated plays and still reveal something new on each listen.

The song cleverly plays on the group's coquettish ladette image ('Chain smokin', always laughin', always jokin''), but also describe a woman's admission of her own frailties within a relationship and are charmingly understated and honest. The song's frame of reference - a domestic setting ('a cup of black coffee') and the intimate everyday minutiae of a relationship ('the little things that you do') - is about as far removed as you can get from the emotional hysteria of a diva ballad. Somehow All Saints manage to sound down-to-earth but effortlessly classy at the same time.

STEVE BYNGHALL

Talent show contestants



Hear'say
Everybody
UK POLYDOR CD SINGLE 570 512-2 (2001)

Talent show contests like *Pop Idols* and *X-Factor* try to persuade us that pop industry professionals like Louis Walsh and Pete Waterman wield an uncanny power over the charts. We're told that their ears for a tune are so astute and their influence is so all pervasive, they can effectively decide who has a hit and when. But in practice their reputations are undermined the moment the shows end. The process goes something like this: 1) the contest winners receive a record contract and the promise of a glittering career; 2) the first hit is easy (the publicity created by the show ensures that); but 3) the hits soon dry up. Is this just down to callous disinterest on the part of the pop svengalis involved? Or maybe the charts are harder to crack than they make out.

The latter seems to be the case with Hear'say. As you may remember they were the winners of the original *Popstars* series back in early 2001, and thereafter became the first reality pop show casualties, going from the top of the charts to public indifference within the space of a year. Their bland tunes, poorly chosen costumes, and increasingly desperate attempts to settle on an image suggested that whoever was pulling their strings was at a loss to know what to do with this ill-matched bunch of wannabes. The band just didn't seem cut out to be pop stars, singing and dancing like a bunch of gawky teenagers at a youth club, which just confirms that audition by public vote isn't a very good way to put a band together.

But whilst the tabloids were taking great delight in charting the slow and tragically public disintegration of the band, few noticed that their second album had produced a lively and punchy corker of a single, with a bunch of great melodies and a larger-than-life sound which seems to spill out the stereo and brighten up the day. You've got to admire producers Ash Howes and Martin Harrington for making anything of the ragbag talents at their disposal, but somehow they contrive to spin gold out of straw. Noel delivers the opening line like he's the dullest man in the world, but a romantic moment is ahead when Myleene's vocal trips down the scales in the opposite direction and meets his in the middle. And while Hear'say were always trying to pretend they were just a bunch of mates who happened to be in a band, this song's celebratory group chorus is the closest they came to convincing us it might be true.

Something in the song's idiosyncratic chord changes betrayed the involvement of top songwriting / production duo Richard Stannard and Julian Gallagher (who had a hand in Five's 'Keep on Moving', Kylie's 'Love at First Sight' and several of the best Spice Girls tunes). And whilst this seems to confirm Stannard and Gallagher as some sort of benchmark of chart pop quality, I wish it felt more like discovering the tip of the iceberg and less like reaching the bottom of the barrel.

HARLEY RICHARDSON

Girls Aloud

Love Machine

UK POLYDOR 9867984 CD SINGLE (2004)

Girls Aloud are the flipside of Hear'say. Back in 2002 they won *Pop Stars: The Rivals* and three years later they're still gracing the UK pop charts, if gracing is the right word. Along with Liberty X, they're often wheeled out whenever anyone wants to prove that TV talent shows can produce artistes with genuine ability and broad enduring appeal. And there's no denying it, some of their songs aren't bad. 'Sound of the underground', 'No Good Advice' – both fair enough by me, although I haven't rushed out to buy them.

Why have they succeeded yet others have failed? Part of the reason for the longevity of Girls Aloud's career is that their managers actually put some energy and commitment behind the group, teaming them up with a hip production house (Brian Higgins's Xenomania) and giving them some half-decent modern-sounding material to perform, instead of the usual pop tosh.

(Although it should be pointed out that 'modern' here means the 70s-style electropop that's been fashionable for the last few years).

Yet much as I admire this, it's still hard to develop any fondness for the band or their music. Maybe this is because Girls Aloud wear their cynicism very proudly on their sleeves. Their whole act seems knowing and calculated in every way, from the cutie / bad girl image to the coy references to sex. And as performers, the lasses in Girls Aloud have all the charm of a bunch of jaded strippers.

There's also a really unpleasant cut-glass edge to their singing (and I don't like to be cynical about these things, so I'm assuming it *is* them singing). It's instructive to compare them with their chart predecessors, the Spice Girls. Pop connoisseur Peter Bagge pointed out that whilst the Spices had nominally different personality-types (Sporty, Scary, etc), they all had the *same* shouty, self-obsessed personalities. Girls Aloud go one further: they also have identical *singing voices*, which makes the great lengths taken on stage to ensure each girl gets their turn on the mike pretty laughable. At least we could tell the Spice Girls' voices apart.

I do like their 2003 hit 'Love Machine' though. Perhaps that's because its rhythm track is blatantly ripped off The Fall's space age rockabilly classic 'Cyber Insekt' (from acclaimed long player *The Unutterable*). There's no acknowledgement for MES and co naturally – although there's a whacking seven other songwriters listed on the sleeve. Even the studio tea boy gets a credit these days. But it's the same drum pattern, same rhythm guitar, same chord changes, same middle eight, more or less the same structure. Evidence if we needed it that pop producers don't spend all their spare time listening to chart pop records. (Incidentally this isn't the first example of The Fall influencing a mainstream pop act – compare The Spice Girls' 'Spice up your life' with 'Gut of the Quantifier' for another).

Anyway I love what Xenomania have done with the track. The Girls Aloud arrangement retains the original tune's propulsive drive but gives it a fab popped up makeover and an entirely new 1920s-style vocal which zig zags all over the place in a fashion that fits the silly knockabout lyrics perfectly ('I'll breathe underwater cause I like the way it feels'). And just when you think you've got the measure of the song, a whole slew of new hooks are introduced one after the other during the last minute, at the point where most songwriters would be asking for 'ad lib and fade out here'. Funny isn't it? You wait ages for a decent hook to come along, then three turn up at once.

HARLEY RICHARDSON

US teens are spoiled bums

Daphne and Celeste

We didn't say that!

UK UNIVERSAL CD MCD 60073/159326-2 (2000)

If you remember American teen brats Daphne and Celeste, it might surprise you to know that their act was a British concoction and that they never released a record in their own country.

As child performers Daphne DiConcetto and Celeste Cruz became friends during a stateside advertising shoot. How they came to release records on this side of the pond isn't clear, but I hazard a guess that their in-your-face personalities made them difficult to forget. It seems plausible that someone in the biz met them and saw an opportunity to capitalise on the Brits' seemingly endless fascination with American high schools (witness *Buffy*, *Clueless*, *The Faculty*, etc). D&C's schtick was part-celebration, part-parody of teen girl culture – which meant it could be taken both at face value (by the younger fans) and as ironic (by the older ones). Daphne and Celeste in a haunted house? 'It's the Boogie Man! I've always wanted to meet him.' 'Me too, he's soooo scary!'

D&C were briefly very popular with kids and some adults. Everett True of the Melody Maker championed them and one overexcited journalist described them as 'the best pop band on the planet'. Of course that wasn't saying much in 2000. Before the bubble burst they did leave us with two genuine bubblegum classics, 'Ooh stick you!' and 'U.G.L.Y.' (which, though it's hard to credit, is based on a Fishbone song).

Insult songs. We love 'em. And these two tunes (essentially the same song) are just a string of great insults. Captain Beefheart would no doubt approve of lines like 'Everybody knows you eat the nails from your toes and you rub 'em in dirt and eat them for dessert!' and '…you put fleas in cheese, mix them with glue and use it like shampoo!' And whilst D&C might shock your 'greasy greasy grand-mammy', it's hard to imagine their records causing a sudden outbreak of increased spitefulness amongst children, as was predicted by some critics. It's not as if kids need any help finding ways to insult each other. And believe it or not, there's a subtle moral lesson encoded in the ending of 'Ooh stick you!', which suggests that when you take arch coolness too far, there's nowhere to go except duelling 'whatever's.

The LP *We didn't say that!* is a quite good attempt to contrive a modern bubblegum album based on the bubbly personalities of the duo. It doesn't always work - simply stringing together a bunch of cute nonsense

words, as per 'Roll Call', does not a great bubblegum track make. But the hits sound like they were chucked together during a lunchbreak by a bunch of session musicians indulging their Monkees/Louie Louie obsessions and throwing a few computer game samples in for good measure. And that's a good thing, obviously. The album was in fact put together by dance producer Michele Chiavarini, who played most of the instruments himself, and co-writer Summer Burkes. The arrangements are appealingly cheap, cheerful and ramshackle. And despite what you may have heard, the cover of *School's Out* rocks.

As Daphne and Celeste were aged 16-17 at the time, they were a little too old to be throwing schoolyard insults around, so Chiavarini sped up their voices to make them sound younger. But weirdly he only did it on the hits. Elsewhere it's obvious that Daphne and Celeste couldn't decide whether to sing like women or girls. They have OK voices, although they're only really suitable for pastiche – which is handy as the rump of the LP is a bunch of so-so genre parodies ('Peek-a-boo', 'Spy Girl', 'Never been to Memphis'). As for their rapping, well it's slightly better than the cast of *Grange Hill.*

They were pitched as an alternative to the manufactured boy/girl bands of the time, although arguably they were just as contrived. But a large part of D&C's appeal is that they actually seem to like music. When they appeared as contestants on *Never Mind The Buzzcocks* they impressed our editor with their love of T-Rex and their surprisingly broad knowledge of pop history. (That said, when they met Alice Cooper they thought he was a member of Kiss).

They were also rather short and dumpy for pop stars, and known for making unruly pronouncements on any subject that came into their heads. (In her sleeve note biog, Celeste notes that she comes from Newark, New Jersey, 'The Murder Capital of America'.) But this didn't stop them getting bottled off stage at both the Leeds and Reading festivals in 2000, an event which effectively ended their careers. It also seems likely to be our abiding memory of them, thanks to the footage having become Top 10 clip show fodder. Their second album never materialised and their record label quietly dropped them. It's a harsh world. Now, where can I get some of that candy beer?

HARLEY RICHARDSON

JIVEJones

Me, Myself and I

USA JIVE / ZOMBA CD 9222632 (2001)

'Young man, forget all you have been taught about singing through your mouth. You must unlearn what you have learnt. The way of true believers is through a different route, through the nose.'

Is that what these highly paid voice coaches teach their young acolytes? That's what the evidence suggests, but it sure isn't singing as we know it. I often wonder how this style of vocalising came to dominate our charts.

Maybe it's nothing more than passing fashion, just as everyone imitated Jagger back in the 60s. Or maybe it's the only way to coax anything approaching a note out of tone deaf dorks. Either way, standards have plummeted. Turn on the radio and there's a zillion pop stars attempting to take the nasal route to our hearts. It's high time this trend ended.

That said, we'll let American teen pop auteur JIVEJones get away with it just this once. He seems to have an obnoxious personality to match the obnoxious voice, but his highly enjoyable single, 'Me, Myself and I' (nothing to do with the De La Soul song), wouldn't be the same without it. The chorus is just one long stutter, as he keeps tripping over himself trying to get the title of the song out, with his sampled guitar doing much the same. When Jones does manage to deliver some lyrics in a normal singing voice, he comes out with apparent non-sequitars such as: 'Today I got hate / Made the grade / I guess I'll graduate / Oh hell, smoking can kill / Oh how I love these days.' In fact the whole song is a paean to blocked communication, teenage confusion and wanting to be left alone by adults.

Don't bother getting the LP though. The invention and promise of the single is entirely absent, and whilst Jones is allowed to write and produce most of the material himself, he can't seem to decide if he wants to be Lenny Kravitz, Eminem or Busted. A track called 'The Money Shot' (hook line: 'Everybody loves the money shot') deserves a second listen though for chutzpah if nothing else.

HARLEY RICHARDSON

Jojo

Jojo

USA DA FAMILY/BLACKGROUND RECORDS B0002672-02 CD (2004)

From a scarily early age, child prodigy Jojo had a remarkable voice that caused people to sit back and gape open-mouthed in amazement whenever she sang. Bill Cosby and Oprah Winfrey were early fans, and she got a record contract soon after appearing in the *America's Most Talented Kids* TV show. She was just 13 when she released this album, prompting some to mutter that 'kids are growing up so young these days' and others to wonder if Jojo was being primed to be the next Britney Spears. But put any questions about sleazy corporate exploitation of minors out of your mind. Her success is clearly on the strength of her voice - easily one of the purest and most confident in the current pop world – and her record label have wisely resisted any attempts to sex up her image (for the time being at least).

According to her online biography, Jojo (real name Joanna Levesque) learnt to sing by imitating her mother, a trained singer. She was also exposed to Ella Fitzgerald, Aretha Franklin, Whitney Houston and Etta James at home, which may go some way to accounting for her relatively wide range of expression, as she hasn't just copied whoever's in the charts at the moment. It's probably also why she doesn't sound like every other singer on the block.

Jojo also sounds at least ten years older than she is, a refreshing change when the general

trend is in the opposite direction. Yet there's no sign of artifice in her delivery and she hasn't just adopted the vocal tics of older singers (as did say Joss Stone). Her voice does actually seem to convey some experience of life. Which means I hope she is faking it. Her life as it comes across in song doesn't sound like it has been much fun. In the vernacular, she always sounds pissed. At 13 I was still collecting Smurfs but in most of her songs she's either negotiating a tricky breakup, laying down terms for continuing a relationship, or fighting over a guy with some other girl. But, leaving aside her age, the drama in her music is in the sudden swoops from her defiant mode to an angelic and effortless falsetto, providing glimpses of light which suggest she manages to rise above it all, if only now and then.

This album produced a couple of excellent pop singles – 'Leave (Get Out)' and 'Baby it's you'. It's padded out with some decent enough R&B tracks and it's a shame that this gives Jojo an excuse to drift into the round-the-houses style of singing that's currently ubiquitous. Not that there's anything wrong with a bit of ad-libbing, but in many cases it just seems to be covering up a lack of ideas. Jojo isn't the worst culprit by any means (that's Cristina Aguilera, the girl who sings like she's mid-way through a particularly difficult visit to the toilet). But its easy to imagine her getting worse if she gets more successful. Maybe someone close to her needs to institute a series of spot fines whenever she strays off the tune. Anyone know James Brown's phone number?

HARLEY RICHARDSON

The Lamenting Octopus

My Cat Is An Alien – already represented with an impressive bounty this ish – also released four split LPs in 2004, in their 'From the Earth to the Spheres' series (OPX LP1-LP4). The original vinyl issues were limited edition art-objects with hand-painted covers by Roberto Opalio; I noticed the band were selling one of the last-ever copies at the Music Lovers' Field Companion Festival and asking about £100 for it. Instant collector's items – doncha just love 'em. In each case, side one would feature a 20-minute piece from a guest star; side two would be MCIAA. They did it with Thurston Moore, Thuja, Jackie-O Motherfucker and Jim O'Rourke. The music on all these is pretty good, if you like endless long-form droning. I think they were reissued as CDs in the UK on Very Friendly Records, almost immediately after the vinyl editions sold out.

Autodigest followed up his pretentious *A Compressed History of Everything Ever Recorded Volume 1* with a *Volume 2*, jointly released on two labels (ASH 6.1 and CRONICA 016). It's a CD-length piece constructed from recordings of audience applause. What a conceptual breakthrough, I don't think! We're asked to accept this piffle as some form of post-Debordian commentary on consumerism. Hmph!

Shaolin Wooden Men have a quite nice studio CD on Psy-Harmonics from Australia. It's very influenced by Boredoms. They even sent a copy to Yamantaka Eye, who deemed it 'Punk Eno'. *A Binary Input to Flesh Antenna* (PSY-050) is its name and it's a rollicking 40 minutes of electronic-percussion crescendo-reaching.

Pink Eye's *Dead Eye Driftin'* (EVER17) is a CDR of barely perceptible ambient murk, on the UK's Evelyn Records label. One of series of records you can only get through subscription. Try www.evelynrecords.cjb.net. Vaguely related is the **DJSlurry** item (kkcd34) on another no-budget label, Kabuki Kore; it's minimal electro music with clunky beats, mostly out of my line, but I have to assume it's more 'artistic' than commercial club music.

Merzbow's *Rattus Rattus* (Scarcelight SLR40) disappoints, despite great green cover artwork with a diagram of a red rat inside a lightbulb. Seems to be old (1999) recordings Masami recycled for this label when he was feeling bored.

Sweetness Will Overcome (SEGER 14) is a compilation on the Swedish Segerhuva label. A lot of frankly very tedious retro-noise, filled with unacceptable intimations of violence and oppression. 'Pleasure and pain' is their motto. There may be some good cuts on here, but I can't face it. This label is really living in the past and has taken Whitehouse as its idol. Deluded fools!

More hot goodies are on the baking rack courtesy of Vinyl-On-Demand, the German label that specialises in beautiful vinyl limited-edition productions; the only problem (for me at any rate) is that the owner tends to concentrate on rehashing dreary electronic or industrial murk from the 1980s. I received CDR facsimiles rather than full vinyl editions. **Die Tödliche Doris** make an apocalyptic racket on *Welten-Worlds-Ohontsa'shon:'a* (VOD19), which features a 1984 concert recording. Utterly repulsive. **Kosmonautentraum** (ie Michael Jarick) has a load of his seven-inch minimal electro-beat records from 1980-1982 compiled on *Ungehörtes Unerhörtes* (VOD20). Clunky. Members of Ralf Wehowksy's 1980s group **PD** (later P16.D4) have a triple LP retrospective of their early Selektion cassette tapes, called *Wahrnemungen 1980/1981* (VOD18). As if we really needed to hear any more of that stuff!

The Magic Carpathians Project are Polish underground heroes to many. Their *Sonic Suicide ethnoise #1* (VIVO 014CD) release is abrasive and harsh psychedelic downer music with tons of trebly guitars, mad percussion and wailing.

If you're still looking for further ear-crunching noise from **The New Blockaders**, they continue to be active despite providing impression that project has come to an end. *Sound Sketch for Raging Flames* is a collaboration with **Gosplan Trio**, three Russian guys who play guitars, woodwinds and electronics. A limited edition artefact on KlangGalerie (GG92), it's actually pretty transcendent; it delivers promised flames and they rage. **MSBR**'s *Metal Stricken Terror Action dedicated to Richard Rupenus* (dz-cd003) is a touching tribute in sound to the main man behind TNB. It seems to be mostly a remastered version of his *Positive Action* LP from 1995, though there are a couple of collaborative cuts.

Thighpaulsandra is a Welsh eccentric who is clearly going completely round the twist – if *Double Vulgar II* (mt089) is anything to go by. Worth hearing for 'The Vile Receipt' alone. Filled with zany surrealism and rampant sexuality. Needless to say it's on Beta-Lactam Ring Records – they seem to be in thrall to Nurse With Wound and anything associated with it, and Thighpaul's Coil connections can't have hurt on that account. Available as a CD or a triple LP!

Bernhard Günter is quitting showbiz – at least he's retiring his famous 'silent music' label Trente Oiseaux for the time being. *Ataraxia* (TOC053) is a joint effort by him and Heribert Friedl and may be the last bit of twittering we'll hear from the old 'thirty birds' for a while. Quite nice piece of droning actually, featuring Bern on the 'electric cellotar'.

Raymond MacDonald and Giles Lamb recorded *Asylum Sessions* (D&G 006) in 2004-05 for a film by their friend David MacKenzie. Reasonably inoffensive minimal piano and reeds sounds, including some prepared piano. Try delugeandguitary@hotmail.com for this and further CDRs.

Koji Asano continues to release more material than I can listen to. *Takoyakikun* (Solsitice 037) features his 'rock' trio, whereon Koji plays guitar with drummer Hisashi Nagata and Isao Otake on keyboards. Those expecting something in the Haino mode had better be prepared for something more like Mahavishnu Orchestra or Magma on these 1997 recordings. *Final Insurance* (Solstice 038) is a collection of his earlier works 1992-1994, more firmly back in experimental sound-art mode. It includes 'Lettuce No 1'. Some of it could be a bit more extreme than his later more rarefied material. All his sleeves continue to feature his cover photos, sharp full-colour images of stupefying banality.

Circle are the Finnish rock band led by Jussi Lehtisalo whose other incarnation Pharaoh Overlord is more rocky and preferable. *Empire* (REPOSELP08) is a vinyl LP on Riot Season. Circle take a while to warm up, are more acoustic-y, but still deliver quite good noodling in the psych-trance mode.

Graham Halliwell's *Recorded Delivery* is one of those CDs that drives my PC to despair – it's an audio CD but also has a PDF file for the liner notes. My hard drive just doesn't know where to look! I also recall receiving this one because the postage was 5p underpaid, on which grounds Royal Mail felt justified in charging me an extra £1.50 'handling charge' just to hand it over to me at the depot. (That's not your fault, Graham,

but given title of CD, it's quite an apt anecdote!) Actually quite a relaxing CD of very quiet feedback saxophone droning, in collaboration with Rhodri Davies, Steve Roden, and Mark Wastell. One of the Confront Collectors Series (CCS4) on Mark's label, in clamshell case.

Tenzenmen are an Australian label/organisation who are clearly filled with the optimism that living in such a young country can bring. They sent me three volumes of a CD/magazine format type thing called *Tenzenmen Presents Eccentrics* Issues #1-3. They all feature raucous and unpleasant 'wacky' experimental rock from bands called **Hinterlandt, Zu, Can Can Heads, Limited Express (has gone?), Stalwart, Plat Ypus, Experimental Dental School, Sabot** and **Astro Can Caravan**. The format's good – each band gets two pages in the colour booklet to express whatever they want visuals-wise – but the music is uniformly ghastly. Try and imagine something like The Art Bears played by a primary school orchestra. A lot of fourth-rate Japanese bands are also included in these international surveys, one of which is Ni-Hao!, whose *Red Blue and Green* CD (006TZM) includes their first two releases and a video. Normally three young Japanese girls wearing track suits would get my juices flowing, but their music is shrill, hyper-kinetic garbage.

Martux_M and **Kaffe Matthews** did a split LP on the Stichting Mixer label (MLP.04). Mostly dull and minimal electronics. Would you believe Kaffe's yawn-some contribution is called *Environmental Cleaning Moments*? Finally, we get a record we can play in the background while we do the household chores and not feel guilty about it. Kaffe used to be such a lively improviser. It's a real shame she's lost herself so completely in the digital world now.

The Sons of God are Leif Elggren and Kent Tankred, still up to their zany art pranks on the Firework Editions Records label, with their new release *Connecting The Cross* (FER 1052). This one seems to be some sort of attack on the established church; if any of the information here can be believed (and I'm increasingly sceptical about anything to do with this label these days), they recorded it in the Amit Sen Church Studio in Sweden. The recording set-up shows a large wooden black cross wired up to their laptops and mixing desks. The usual inert, slow, boring sound emerges for over 61 minutes; they justify this with their 'extreme' polemic printed on sleeve. 'We challenge all world's religions', they declare pompously. How? By boring them to death with this stupid music? Well, one good thing about this release is the cover painting, a nice update on the 'Doubting Thomas' motif.

Cottage Industrial Volume 3 (HUMBUG037) is the latest instalment in Humbug's quite-good series of surveys of the international underground scenes; we did receive the previous volumes, not sure if we gave them notice or not. There is some good music here, but as a comp it lacks focus. May be worth snarfing up for its exclusive contributions from **Wooden Wand, Excepter, Idea Fire Company** and **Ryfylke**.

John Pallas is a fellow from Athens in Greece. We met up in London in March 2005 so he could give me a shopping bag marked OVMO. Inside the bag were various CDs and records which represent a cross-sampling of underground experimental work in Greece, many of them released on the 1000+1 TiLt label. It's pretty much all in the realms of dark electronica. **Mecha/orga** is Yiorgis Sakellariou; his *Float* CD (ec01) was issued in 2004 in a metal cannister and comprises 'digital drones'. It's pretty minimal and forgettable. **ps stamps back** have a CD of live recordings, one of them edited together with a live improv by **Id**. Menacing metallic drones are their forte. The Mechanorgy DIY Free Fest event, which took place in Athens May 2004, is represented on a sampler CD with tracks by both of the above artistes, plus **droG_a_tEk** and **Intense Bowel Movement**. The latter has a name that's almost a pastiche of the kind of band name you'd have found on United Dairies in the 1980s. I can't say much for his derivative sample-based music here. **ps stamps back** surfaces again on a record with an exceptionally rude title, in which he joins forces with **Anal Vissi**. 'Pure old fashioned computer music' is how they describe what they do. I can't say any of the music from Athens moves me very much, but John Pallas was a very nice chap. For further info, see www.geocities.com/tiltrecordings.

Ernie Althoff is a Melbourne gallery artist with a record of his sound installations called *Dark by 6* (ANTBOY 07) on Will Guthrie's label. Photos of said installations reminded me of the 1960s game Mouse Trap (from Ideal Games), only not so much fun. Some of the pieces involved chance interactions with the audience. The written descriptions by Althoff are infuriating ('realtime auditory experience' my ass!) and the whole CD sounds like a load of tedious percussive drivel. If he was dark by 6, he'd be outta the window by 7...

London Strings (AbsinthRecord 004) is another compilation in the series of improv records that includes *Berlin Reeds, Bagpipes of Hull* and *Tubas from Birmingham*. I could be lying about one of those titles. This features **Rhodri Davies**, his sister **Angharad Davies, Phil Durrant** and **Mark Wastell**. Haven't heard it, but inclusion of Davies' 'Perdereau' composition alone makes it very noteworthy. This is one of the few pieces of modern music scored for the harp. If you have any other harp ideas, Rhodri is actively looking for compositions. As is customary, the release comprises four mini-CDs mounted on a card.

David Behrman has a new double-CD set called *My Dear Siegfried* (XI RECORDS XI 129), which I can't really recommend despite Behrman's undeniable status as a major US innovator from the 1960s. But on disc two there is one fantastic work from 1969, 'A New Team Takes Over', which uses press conference tapes of the Nixon administration, and remakes them with home-made syntheszier modules into the most amazing ten minutes of terrifying political paranoia you will ever hear. And great sound art too. The rest of the set though, mostly recent pieces, didn't appeal to me as much.

The Grey Field Recordings is mostly R Loftiss, with the help of Justin Jones. Her new record is *Hypnagogia* (ANTICLOCK 016); Loftiss is a dark and slightly gothy poetess who uses backwards tapes, dark ambient sounds, acoustic guitars and portentous instrumentation to further her aims. Very good and convincing example of this sort of thing; if only World Serpent were still going, she'd be made for life! Includes 'Prelude to an Alchemical Wedding'. Would probably please fans of certain aspects of Coil's back catalogue. Lovely letterpress cover with string and sealing wax too!

The highly esteemed USA noise maestro **Ron Lessard** (aka Emil Beaulieu) came to the UK in August 2005. I did not meet up with him, but he sent three CDs of various monstrous things on his own RRRecords label. Thank heavens some people still believe in the aesthetics of subversive collage and over-printed photocopies for their artworks. 'Due Process' is a moveable feast in his universe, but the CD entitled *Combine 1* (RRR CD 20) features himself, Thomas Dimuzio and J Wiggins on a nigh-unlistenable record of depressing sludge. *Moonlight In Vermont* is credited to Emil Beaulieu and comes in a sleeve taking a snipe at obvious targets like Simply Red, John Denver and Elvis. It's roughly 40 minutes of abstract humming, harsh feedback and clattering racket – a gross misuse of electricity in anyone's book. Insufferable! Another Due Process CD, *Fin de la Voix*, may include Jason Lescalleet, Greg Kelley, Chris Cooper, David Quinn and Vic Rawlings. It's full of the sort of vaguely trundling aimless nonsense-noise that made America what it was in the 1990s. I look forward to consuming these in private.

Also to acknowledge receipt of numerous colourful items on the **Sublime Frequencies** label in Seattle; we did a small feature last issue, so sadly these will have to be postponed. They include various folk music, pop music and radio-based samplers from Thailand, Nepal, Lhasa, Sumatra, Indonesia. Burman, Iraq, Cambodia, and North Korea. Plus there's a DVD of a movie called *Niger: Magic and Ecstasy in the Sahel*, exhibiting various musical styles in this African region and made by Hisham Mayet. More extreme exotica than you can handle... And how was YOUR week? (EP)

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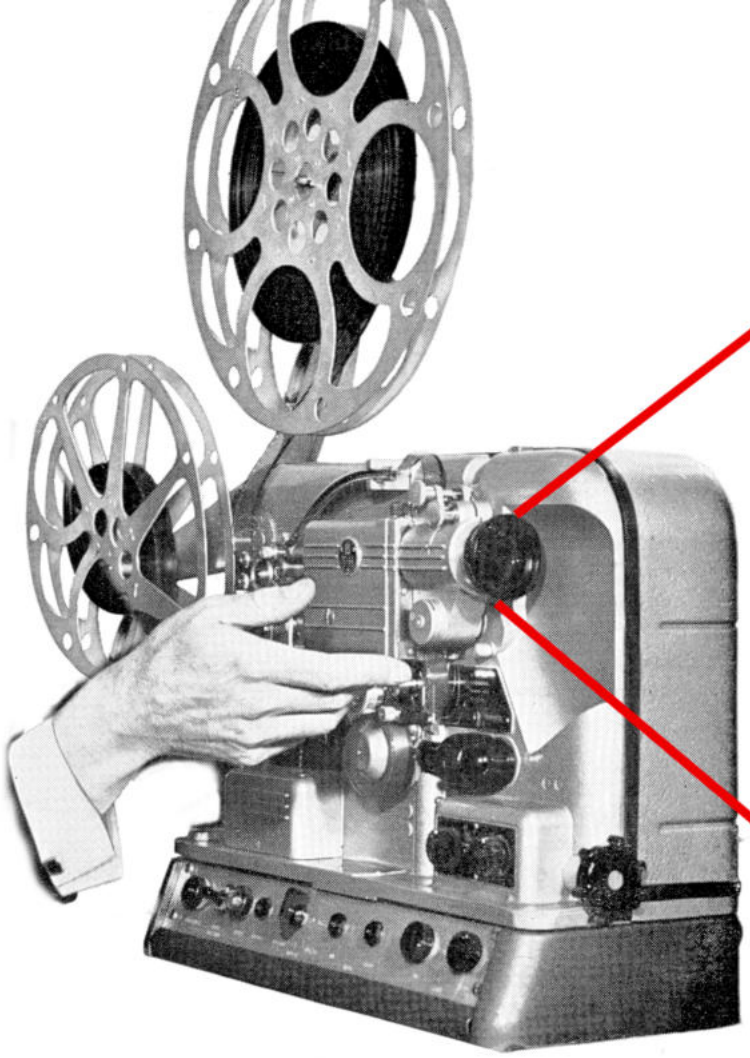

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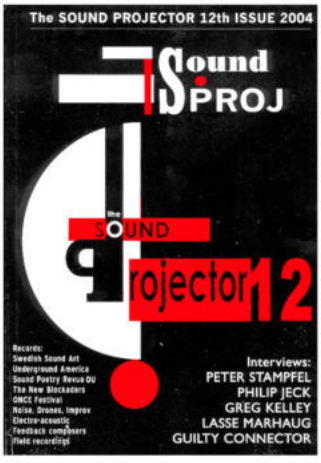
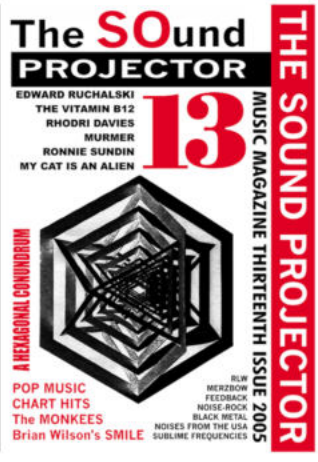
12TH = BLACK KAMMERKONZERT
13TH = HEXAGONAL CONUNDRUM





ED PINSENT
THE SOUND PROJECTOR
BM BEMUSED
LONDON WC1N 3XX
UNITED KINGDOM
www.thesoundprojector.com